



Spring 2012



How to Submit

We want your art, interior design, graphic design, poetry, photography, fiction, non-fiction, fashion, architecture, comics, political thoughts, and anything else that's entertaining.

To submit your work, download a waiver from our new website (wp.auburn.edu/circle), fill it out, and turn it into our office in room 1115 of the New Student Center.

To submit art, photography, fashion, architecture, or design:

send a digital file of at least 300 dpi, saved as a JPEG, to theaucircle@gmail.com.

To submit anything in text:

send a word document to theaucircle@gmail.com and submit a hard copy to our office (New Student Center room 1115).



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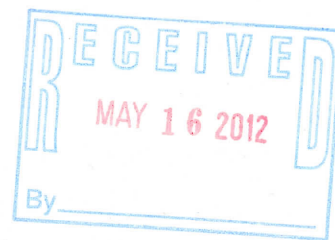
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The Auburn Circle Spring 2012



the auburn circle

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On the Plains

Upcoming Events in the Auburn Area

The Gnu's Room:

The Gnu's Room will hold Expression Café, an open mic opportunity for poets, creative writers and musicians, on the first Friday of every month at 7:00 p.m.

The Gnu's Room will be holding a book event with Glover and Durham at 4:00 p.m. as well as a music event with Kyle and the Cave at 7:00 p.m. on May 12th.

The Gnu's Room will be holding a POV film screening of *My Reincarnation* on May 17th at 7:00 p.m.

The Gnu's Room will be hosting music by Russell Gulley on May 18th at 7:00 p.m.

Jule Collins Smith Museum of Fine Arts:

The Jule Collins Smith Mu-

seum of Fine Arts will exhibit *Facing South: Portraits of Southern Artists* by Jerry Siegel from June 2nd to August 18th.

The Jule Collins Smith Museum of Fine Arts will exhibit *Art Interrupted: Advancing American Art and The Politics of Cultural Diplomacy* from September 1st to January 5th.

The Auburn Writer's Conference:

The third annual Auburn Writers Conference, *The Winding Road: Travel, Identity and the Search for Voice*, will be held October 12th and 13th.

College of Liberal Arts:

The College of Liberal Arts will be holding a luncheon and

book signing with Lilly Ledbetter at the Auburn University Hotel and Conference Center on May 15th at 11:30 a.m.

Jan Dempsey Community Arts Center:

Jan Dempsey Community Arts Center will be hosting the SummerNight Downtown Art Walk on June 15th at 6:00 p.m.

The Community Writing Center:

The Community Writing Center will be holding workshops and one-on-one help for writers in the Lee County Area. Visit communitywritingauburn.org for further details.



Convergence by Frank Orona

On Studying Abroad

Kiersten Wones and Liz Conn

Opinion

Kiersten Wones, a creative writing major, and Liz Conn, a journalism major, give their unique impressions on culture shock, European fashion, food, and a myriad of other things Auburn students can expect when studying abroad.

On A Thursday Afternoon

I've never been much for New Year's Resolutions, but this year there'd been something nagging at me for a while, and I decided to give the cliché tradition a try. It had occurred to me some months before, when struggling with a long-distance relationship, that I never felt like I was actually present in my own day-to-day life. It wasn't long after this idea took hold that the relationship came to an end and I began to notice my surroundings in Auburn for what felt like the first time. With no boyfriend to pine over from six hundred miles away, I became aware of the beauty of the place where I lived: the smile on the face of a complete stranger walking past on the sidewalk (these smiles are rare in the North); the stories and traditions hiding behind every tree and reddish building; the bluest sky on a fall day when 86,000 gather to cheer with one voice: War Eagle. When I called Auburn my home for the first time in

over two years, I knew I was doing something right, learning something important. The idea took hold and I began to notice things, people, memories that were dragging my attention away from the present. Cellphones, Facebook, Twitter, constantly ding, ding, dinging. Petty questions about the past—should I really have said that to the boy at the bar last night?—and the future—what am I going to wear to the game this weekend? I finally became so fed up that as the New Year rolled around it brought a big ball of cliché along: *Carpe Diem*, it said. Seize the day. Seize today. Not yesterday, or tomorrow. Today. Here I am in this moment, so let's think about this moment, this room, this friend.

I was riding along on that New-Year's-Resolution high that boosts the profits of gyms and health-food stores everywhere, when I encountered two significant obstacles weighing down my *carpe diem* cloud:

1) 2012 suddenly meant that graduation, which

was always "so far down the road," was now "just around the corner." Maybe the looming end of the world isn't so poorly timed after all.

2) On January 9th, I moved to Alcalá de Henares, Spain, 4,000 miles from every single person, comfort, and routine that I had ever known. It's difficult not to be glued to your Facebook when your only source of familiarity is somehow contained inside its neat, blue and white pages.

So now what was I supposed to do? I knew a total of eight people in the entire country, I now had to shower in a box the size of a port-a-potty, and good peanut butter was nowhere to be found. By day five my roommate and I were looking around to make sure nobody saw us duck into McDonald's, desperate for a taste of home.

One day I remembered something my dad had said. "Wherever you are, be there." Be here, be now, I kept telling myself. But how could I focus on seizing the day when every day was unfamiliar? I grabbed a few friends and sat down to embrace the one thing I felt like I could be good at here: Planning. With Fridays off, our opportunities to travel

were endless and I became absorbed in my calendar, penciling in times for trains, taxis, and airplanes; names of hostels and monuments to visit; new vocab words to communicate with airport officials and make our way through Metro stations. I had a list that numbered every weekend from January to August: 1. Madrid, 2. Barcelona . . . 9. Portugal . . . 25. Paris. As if my life could be checked off, week by week, on a torn piece of notebook paper.

One weekend we were headed to Salamanca, home to one of the oldest universities in the world. I reluctantly exited the train after two hours of gazing at the most beautiful countryside I had ever seen, and realized I didn't care one bit to be in Salamanca. If only we could keep heading towards it, I thought. And then I remembered something my friend had said once about airports: "They're nowhere, this thing built between places. I'd rather be somewhere." But there I was, just wishing I was nowhere. In transit. So much for *carpe diem*.

It wasn't until my birthday that I found—or, more aptly, was force-fed—a way to make now the most important thing on my agenda. Carmen, the world's best host mom, insisted that we make it a big celebration to honor my "first Spanish birthday." Ángel, her husband, rolled his eyes and grumbled that "here in Spain, we're

always finding excuses to celebrate." I could get used to that, I thought. What I didn't realize was that celebrating included, on top of our usual two- or three-course lunch, three different types of dessert and multiple rounds of champagne. Apple cake, some sort of Spanish variation on the donut, homemade ice cream with nuts and raisins. My roommate and I coined the phrase "I haven't eaten this much since America," and were soon explaining the concept of a "food coma" to our host family. "But you have to eat everything!" Carmen insisted. "It's your birthday."

The two days of effort—shopping, baking, breaking out her grandmother's dishes—that Carmen spent in preparation for my birthday, after she'd only known me for two weeks, was the best birthday present anyone could have given me. I realized that she really thought of us as family, and that she wanted us to think of her home as our home. And if she thought of it as my home, why couldn't I? Slowly, my favorite books made their way onto the shelves in my room, while birthday cards and typical college-student clutter scattered themselves across my desk. I discovered that the way to make the here-and-now important was to make it my own. I gave a little bit of myself to even the most ordinary moments, and those moments began to give themselves back to me.

Is that a little too cliché for my taste? You bet it is. But lately I've been learning that clichés are overused for a good reason. Here I am, halfway across the world from everything I've ever known, and I'm beginning to figure out that there have been little pieces of myself waiting for me to come find them. No, the bartender at the local pub isn't the same one I laugh with every Wednesday in Auburn, but I'll introduce myself, and he'll make a joke about my Spanish, and then we'll have a little moment of our own to hold onto. When I stepped out of the Metro station in Barcelona and La Sagrada Familia—expected to be the world's tallest church upon completion—loomed over me, at first I said, yeah, we're not in Kansas anymore. But then I heard that clock on construction on the beautiful, bizarre towers was at over a century and ticking due to lack of funding, I thought, No money? Well there's something I can relate to.

I'll always be an American. As much as I'd like to act like I blend in here perfectly, I don't. I'm not sure if I'll ever get used to having lunch at three o'clock, or that I'll ever stop bruising my elbows in our tiny shower. I'll definitely never stop craving Reese's cups. But I can let Carmen act like my grandmother when she makes me button up my sweater on the way out the door, and I can laugh at the Spanish boys who,

despite their adorable accents, have pick-up lines that are just as bad as American ones. And, if I haven't thrown enough cliché in, they say that home is where the heart is. And I believe it. I somehow managed to fit my heart into a fifty-pound suitcase and drag it onto a plane, and I've made my home here on a Thursday afternoon in Alcalá de Henares, Spain.

I guess the next step is to pick up this bizarre European fashion. "Does this match?" I ask my roommate.

"No," she shrugs. "But when in Rome . . ."

— Kiersten Wones

My Spanish study abroad experience began with a "War Eagle."

On an American Airlines flight from New York to Madrid, I saw a mid-40s flight attendant wearing an Auburn lanyard. Naturally, we exchanged the typical Auburn greeting. He asked me what I'm studying at Auburn.

"Journalism," I replied.

"This may not be what you want to hear," he said, "but that's what I studied at Auburn, too."

This was not what I wanted to hear. During my four months abroad, I was hoping to have some sort of divine revelation about what I'm going to do with my life—something along the lines of a text message from God—but now I began to wonder if this flight attendant were an angel in disguise.

The previous few days



Photography by Hunter Dyas

had been slightly stressful, as packing a four-month wardrobe into one suitcase proved more challenging than expected. All kinds of questions popped into my head. How many shoes could I fit in my suitcase? Are Nike shorts acceptable any other place on the planet besides Auburn? Would my tweezers be considered a weapon by TSA?

As it turns out, no one wears Nike shorts outside the Southeastern Conference.

I was totally unprepared for European fashion. Europeans, both male and female, wear outfits that are at once stylish, bizarre and flamboyant. When it is 32 degrees outside, it is totally normal for a woman to wear cut-off denim shorts, black fishnet tights and an overcoat. In America, they would be women of indecent behavior. In Europe, they are hipsters.

Reality hit when I went to my new school for the first time. When I learned that it was built in the 16th century, I realized this was most definitely not the Haley Center.

Common sense had led me to believe that if I came to Spain, I would hear mostly Spanish music. Little did I know that I would hear Miley Cyrus in the supermarket on my second day. I thought putting an ocean in between Miley and myself would eliminate that problem.

A few days later, I heard Hanson's "MMMBop" playing in a bar. I thought putting a decade in between Hanson and myself would eliminate that problem.

Even Spanish television is more American than I thought. My host mom, for example, likes American shows with Spanish dubbed over them. "Law and Order" was no surprise, since everyone in the world watches it.

But then she turned on "Gossip Girl." She is 68 years old.

As for me, I turned 21 three weeks after arriving in Spain. Celebrating a 21st birthday overseas has its plusses and minuses. As a plus, my Facebook notifications continued for an extra seven hours after my birthday ended in Spain. The down side, of course, is the irony of turning 21 in a country where it doesn't matter.

On a birthday trip to Salamanca, we found a shot bar that serves any shot—from a list of shots practically classified by phylum and genus—for one euro. Europeans are the only people in the world who could get away with this. A one-dollar shot bar in Auburn would lead to hospitalization of half the student body every Wednesday.

Just after midnight, I heard Usher, Lil Jon and Ludacris crooning from the speakers. I promptly had a horrible flashback to junior-high dances. Had I fallen into a time warp? Was I actually celebrating my 14th birthday? I clutched my face desperately to make sure I didn't have braces. Take that and rewind it back.

When I wasn't watching "Law and Order" or enjoying an afternoon siesta, I had been frequently asking God to help me out with this divine revelation. After all, I'm on kind of a tight schedule here. For the previous year or so, I had questioned my choice of major and future career. I have a type A per-



Hummingbird by Shelby Boston

sonality—competitive and high-strung, which leaves little room for ambiguity.

But with seemingly no response, I began to get frustrated.

It wasn't until I stumbled across 1 Samuel 3 that I realized I was the one to blame for the lack of response.

"Speak, for your servant is listening," Samuel says to God.

The voice of Jiminy Cricket inside my head put inflection on the word "listening."

All along I had been saying, "Speak." But that's only half the deal.

Spain is the second noisiest country in the world, behind Japan. Through all the noise, I've stopped listening.

Maybe I need less Usher, and more God.

I'm still waiting on my divine revelation. But if that falls through, I now have a Plan B. American Airlines, here I come.

— Liz Conn

The Empties

Kelsi Johnston

"Your mother ever teach you not to put your feet in chairs?" she says to me, running her middle finger around the mouth of the bottle that sat on the bar in front of her. I look away from Mr. Lopez pulling his darts out of the electronic dartboard to see a girl in a pink dress sitting two stools down from me.

The only thing my mother ever tried to teach me was how to drink like a man while still sitting like a lady. Pulls in the prospects, she told me once. I guess part of that little lesson didn't stick.

"Your mother ever teach you not to talk to strangers?" I say, pulling my feet down out of the cushioned stool between us. My heels clunk against one of the wooden bars that stretches between the legs of the tavern's old barstool. A place that knows me well, and where I'm beginning to sway.

"Did yours ever teach you not to make faces like that?" she says, and laughs. Why she's laughing at me, I'm not exactly sure, but she's sitting there doing it. I remember seeing her earlier, speaking to several people at different tables, laughing like that. "It could freeze that way."

I'm staring at her, and I know my nose is crinkled up

though I can't exactly feel it anymore. I try to ignore her, and that face she's making. Sideways. I wonder if there's lipstick on my teeth, or if it's something else making her look at me like that.

"Yeah, I can see there's a huge run on seating going on here," I say, throwing my hand to the empty room around us. Empty, sure, except Mr. Lopez throwing darts as usual beside a row of empty booths, lined up just behind where I and this rather annoying customer sit. The booth to Mr. L's right holds a plastic pitcher dangerously low on Michelob.

"Yeah, I went to the bathroom, and I guess I missed that y'all were closing," she says, looking around.

We're not closing, but I let her think what she wants.

"Lacey," she says, confident. She tips the mouth of her beer in my direction. I think about how she toyed with it a second ago.

"Lacey," I say, rolling the name around on my tongue and trying like hell for her to not see how I must have been blushing. My face burned just below and behind my eyes. Thank god Mr. Lopez sprung for what I think is the biggest discount in bar lighting that I've ever seen--old used bulbs that Mrs.

Lopez had boxed up forever ago, meaning to trash them eventually--in a few chipped stained glass lamps that dotted the faded mahogany bar and table tops in the small rock-floored room. The low blue glow of our only neon sign on the wall makes her pink dress look strange.

"Yep, Lacey," she says, and I know by her raised eyebrows that she expects me to tell her my name, but I look away instead. She smells like strawberries. Usually the only thing we can smell in here is whatever sticky combination of beer and wine that's been spilled on the floor over the course of the night.

Damn you, Mr Lopez, you wonderful man. He makes the best pineapple upside down cake shot I've ever had. The only one I've ever had. Not one I should say, because I've had, I think, four tonight, but I mean the only one I've ever tried like this. They make me smile. We only sell beer and wine here at Elsa's Tavern but Mr. L and me, we just keep our own favorite spirits under the bar. We pull them out towards closing time. I hope the bargain lamplight hides my drooping eyelids.

It's 1:30 so the bar crowd, plus the gist of my shift, has come to a halt. It's been this way every night since

I started here three years ago. Once Mr. Lopez hit the dartboard I knew it was Michelob and shot-of-the-week time. It's great fun; we started after I'd been working here a week, after discovering that cricket is our favorite dart game, and that even Mrs. Lopez enjoyed watching the two of us compete. Sometimes when we played, she would come fill pitchers for us while we battled it out. There were nights when she would even bring platefuls of Mr. L's favorite peppery hot dishes, which would often abuse my undeniably white palate while the two of them laughed at the tears in my eyes. One night we played Cricket and ate taquitos for four straight hours only for me

to win by a nose and puke in the oversized gray trash can by the back door. Mr. Lopez plays against himself now. I see Lacey look at him--his leathery skin, his crooked blue tie. I wonder how she is at cricket.

"Like your tattoo." I say to her, hopping down off the stool and making my way behind the bar. "Looks nice."

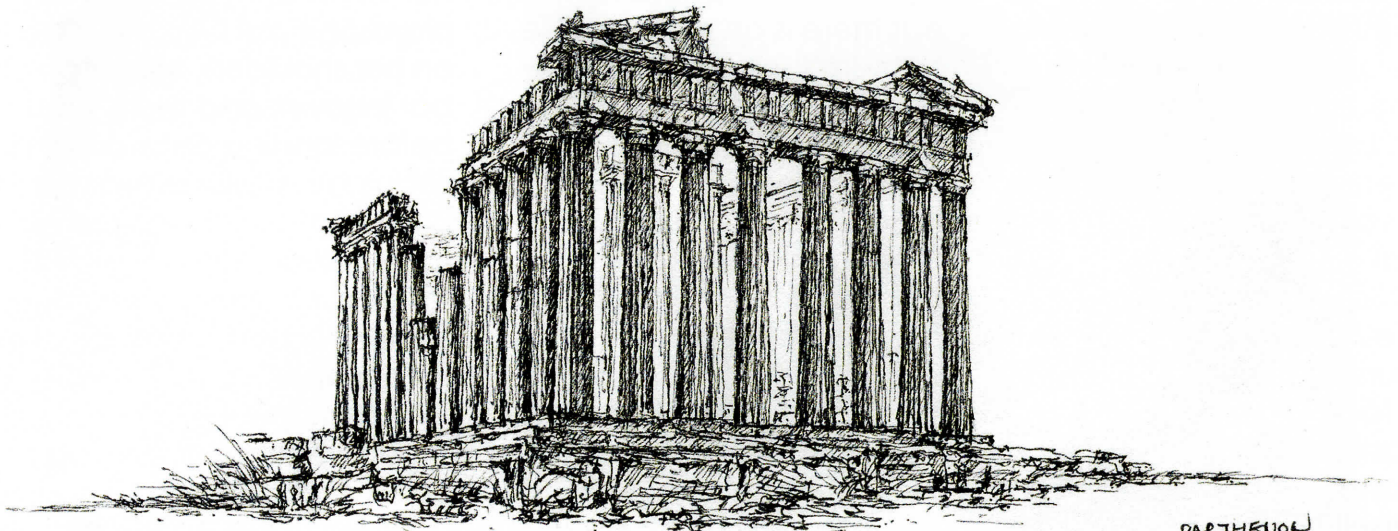
Thinking about the script--no doubt in some language I don't understand right now--scrawled onto the space that stretches just below her collar bones, I grab a plastic pitcher, fill it with Michelob and exchange it for the now empty one on the table beside Mr. Lopez. I take that one back behind the bar and fill it just the same and put it down between Lacey

and the place that I sat a minute ago.

Mr. L gives me a quick gracias and returns to his game.

I decide to stay behind the bar now, because if Mr. Lopez has taught me anything, it's that when I get to swaying like this I should probably stay behind the bar and keep my hands to myself. He likes me, you see, but he says that his 50-something years on this earth should do some good for somebody, and his way of doing that was by pointing out that I'm a Gropey McGee when I get drunk--when I get to swaying like this.

"You have country accent too, mama. When you take the shots," he said to me



PARTHENON
ATHENS, GREECE
26-03-2010

once, imitating me giggling and feeling the biceps of a particularly attractive mustachioed fellow that came to the bar after hours some time ago. I didn't remember at the time that being mustachioed isn't particularly attractive to me, proving that the nickname is more than appropriate.

"People like the groping, Mr. L," I had replied then, but I highly doubted they did.

It's like Mr. Lopez can hear my thoughts, hear those words of his on replay in my head, over the blaring Billy Joel--our after-hours guilty pleasure--because when he turned from his game to pour himself a beer out of the new pitcher, I know I see him grin. Probably because he hears me talking to her. Probably because when I said the word "nice" just now, it came out sounding like nass.

Lacey thanks me immediately after my compliment, at least I think so. I am too busy thinking about that damned old Mr. Lopez, and now I can't even go sit back in my seat. Always looking out for me, that wonderful man.

"So you're having a late night tonight, huh? By yourself?" I say, now face to face with her. I put a tiny plastic cup in front of her so she knows she can help herself to the pitcher. "It's on me."

"Yeah, it's been a shit storm kind of night," she says.

"It's my birthday, twenty-third."

"No kidding," I say, looking at her hair, almost white in color, that she has teased to impressive heights. "I gotta say, this doesn't exactly seem like a great birthday time."

She sits there, finishing up a cup of beer, before cocking her head to the left--and I remember because that made her eyes catch the light of the lamp on the right side of the bar a little better. I can see now that they're blue. Still, she sits there.

"So, what's your name?" she says, finally. I reach across and pour her another beer, spilling a couple of drops. I think I'm about to tell her, but before I do Mr. Lopez appears.

"I'm going to back deck it," he says, and I swear that man's damn eyes were sparkling. They are black as night so it doesn't take much, but there is an extra twinkle to them tonight. It's like he always knows everything. Maybe he can see how nervous I am.

He steps out the door on the far left side of the room, going out for another one of his hand-rolled cigarettes on the tavern's back deck, leaving us alone.

Even though Mr. Lopez is out of earshot now, I still hesitate before speaking again, "I'm Lily."

"Lily," she says, and she looks confused, like maybe I

am lying.

"Happy birthday, Lacey," I say to her before I shuffle, see that's just another way to say sway I guess, my way out from behind the bar with a fresh plastic cup of beer. This place has got to get some bigger cups.

"Gropey McGee! That's what he calls me," I say, and I can hear it echoing like I'm yelling. I think I am yelling. This is the moment I realize that I am not fully aware of exactly what the hell makes up a pineapple upside down cake shot. "He's always teasing me like that. I don't even remember the last time he called me Lily."

For the last hour I have listened to her emphatically relive the most exaggerated story about the most uninteresting events. Her date stood her up for her supposed-to-be raucous, in her words, birthday evening plans. She put her attitude on her shoulders, hit every bar in town, and there's six, before landing on us around midnight. All alone. Now the conversation has moved on to the enigmatic character that is my boss, the graying Mr. L who has owned Elsa's for nearly 15 years.

"And that's why you wouldn't give me your name?" Lacey says, confused, one-eyeing her cup that's almost out of the drink we created--Malibu rum from mine and Mr. L's

stash, and Mountain Dew. We call them Mountain Bu's. Dew the Bu. I know Mr. Lopez is going to like that one.

"No. Well, kind of," I say. "We like to play cricket, or else we used to until I threw up on him--well that's a different story. He calls me Gropey 'cause when I get drunk after hours I tend to--well, you know."

"God, how long have you been working with this old man?" she says, not caring that I hadn't exactly answered her question. I felt a sting of defensiveness come from somewhere deep down, but, not being able to locate it, I keep talking.

"He says I give my name and number out to anyone that comes around, but he's laughing, so I know he's just teasin'," I say. "I just wanted to prove him wrong for once, make him see I'm not just some floozy bar wench."

"How many girls do you hit on?" Lacey says, giggling into her straw.

"There was this one night with me and Mr. L's special chocolate martinis that I'll never live down--"

Lacey sits there, listening as I continue to tell her about the life and times of me and Mr. L--the dynamic duo, I say, and finishing with, "His wife passed some time ago, so he just stays here most of the time working with me." "What happened to her?"

"I don't really know," I say, but I remember so clearly the

day that lung cancer took Elsa Lopez. I just stood behind Mr. L at the casket, too afraid to say anything to him. I thought that if I saw him cry it might break me for good.

"Well," Lacey says, looking like she wanted to change the subject to anything besides the sad story of an old widower. "He was damn right about that country accent of yours."

After a few more Mountain Bu's, Lacey tells me about her tattoo, and how it means

"she flies with her own wings" in French. I tell her that Mr. L has a tattoo of a heart with two swords going through it on his forearm. I tell her how he says he got it a long time ago but he never tells me anything more about it.

I wonder what Mr. L will say about this when we open tomorrow night. I feel like he's still here somewhere, grinning at my unstoppable flirtatiousness, though he left over an hour ago, maybe two.



Low Cotton by Hunter Dyas



The darkness outside the window is starting to lift, and Lacey and I haven't spoken for several minutes. She finally stands to leave, and says to me, "You know, Lily, you can tell Mr. Lopez he's wrong about you. Though I'd like to try one of those chocolate martinis sometime."

She walks out the back door without anything from me.



The sun is peaking up over the hill as I walk out the front door of Elsa's. It usually isn't this late when I leave because Mr. L and I always close up together. Maybe he's right about me. I lock the old wooden door, thinking about how I'd just spent the whole night here with a stranger, for whatever reason, talking about that damn Mr. Lopez. That damned blue tie. His black eyes, and how he laughs when he teases me. How he seems to always know everything. That part, he says, is the advantage of being old, and I always say to him that he's not old.

I turn around to walk down the tavern's new wraparound deck, its fresh, light color almost out of place against such a dark old tavern. I find the stairs that take me into the tiny parking lot. I'm fumbling for my keys in my purse, in much the same way my feet are as they try to negotiate the

gravel. I'm about to accept the fact that I will have to try to find a ride, for my safety and sanity, when I look up. I see a small green Ranger, engine running. Mr. Lopez.

I wobble to the truck door, squinting at the chipped green paint, and the dent from where Mrs. Lopez had accidentally backed her Tahoe into it one day long ago. Mr. Lopez always says that's why he can't bear to get rid of the old piece of shit.

I pull the door open, throwing my purse in the floorboard. When I hop in, I shake the entire cab.

"Mr. L, thank god. Gropey thanks you," I mumble, moving closer to where he sits as he starts to back out of his spot on the gravel parking lot. "So much."

As I lean into Mr. Lopez's shoulder, I realize how uncomfortable I've been all night until now. He smells like English Leather, and he doesn't move away when I lay my head down, my face pressing against his neck. I reach over, and squeeze his arm, and I know that before I fall asleep, I hear him say, "You're welcome, Lily."

Mt. Vernon Forest

Red leaves dot the way I wander
through twisting vines with thorns that scratch,
as the crunching underfoot
sharpens to glass
that lies along the crumbled brick
foundation of a life, community,
once thriving on cars and caffeine,
that has faded under treetops.

Under brush and yellowed buds
I find the makings of their lives—
a house, motor engine, and coffee maker,
where a gray squirrel plays, hiding nuts in coils,
beside a shell from the river's flood
that once flowed through the trees.

Now "forest" echoes through the gnarling leaves;
location is made static. The lives that were—
forgotten and compressed into this single
word. Like the rusting mattress spring,
its recoil will slowly erode into antiquity.

—Karissa Womack

Pollination Song

On the surface
 trembling curtains
 of skin and hair
 ripple in shallow waves
 of lustrous silk
 in fickle spring:
 hungry sucklings
 prey like fiends
 in shiny meadows:
 pliant boughs
 of butterweed sway
 in breezy sunrise:
 metallic wings
 on monarchs lap
 heavy air:
 bulbous spiders
 gild trees with
 pearly threads:
 sparrows dive
 like ashes from
 the smoldering sun:
 satiated earthworms
 bath in the moon's
 phosphorescent dew:
 here, ardent woops and wahs
 dissolve into pallid yawns
 and limp entanglements
 of sleepy limbs.

— Laura Mulqueen

The Grind

I sit behind the wheel
 the cars ahead stand still
 going nowhere anytime soon
 traffic can be such a hassle

the cars ahead stand still
 no clue what's holding things up
 traffic can be such a hassle
 looks like I'll be late for dinner

no clue what's holding things up
 maybe it'll clear up quickly
 looks like I'll be late for dinner
 everybody and their sister is in my lane but

maybe it'll clear up quickly
 I just want to go home
 everybody and their sister is in my lane but
 things seem to be moving

I just want to go home
 looks like there's improvement
 things seem to be moving
 lines are steadily shortening

looks like there's improvement
 I finally see the end
 lines are steadily shortening
 and I'm off for home again

—Marie Sartain

Everyone Has Bangs

Creative
Nonfiction

Karissa Womack

I was eight years old when my neighbor Laura met me at the line of pebbles which separated our properties. The pebbles were arranged along a foot wide line simply to cover up a drainage pipe, but our parents could never have anticipated how thoroughly we would enjoy them. Not only were they smooth and ranging in color from beige to soft orange, features which would intrigue any young child, but there was also the fact that this rocky divide was lava. Anyone who placed so much as a toe in its path would be burned alive. Hopping between yards was a favorite pastime of ours.

Laura usually made the leap into my backyard which was bigger and full of trees so that it made up my own private forest. But our routine changed when Laura's parents got her a trampoline. I worshipped it as the greatest invention of mankind. I spent entire evenings imagining the possibilities if only I could line the floor of my yard with trampolines. I'd never have to walk again; I could bounce happily wherever I needed to go. Most afternoons Laura's mom would bring us out plates of ham pizza and Coke and would even take them back in when we were finished. We would spend hours jumping

on the black net until our heads were so light that we had to hold onto them to keep them from floating off into the sky to join the stars we wished on to stay best friends forever.

On that day in June, the thick Alabama humidity seeped into my shirt and fluffed my long brown hair with frizz. I had been rocking slowly back and forth on my plastic yellow swing, dragging my feet in the ruddy dirt while I waited for Laura to come meet me, staring longingly at the bouncy mecca of joy. When I heard the snap of her wooden porch door bang against its frame, I jumped up from the swing and walked towards the great divide to meet her. The distance from Laura's back porch to the pebbles wasn't very far, and she reached it first. She neither jumped the line of fire into my yard, nor beckoned me to cross. She stood still and silent at the edge of her lawn. I jumped the lava stream to join her, and she turned her small, tanned face towards me. Her lips were pursed tightly, a contrast to her usual gap toothed grin.

Laura got right to her point. "My mom says that you can't be my friend anymore because you don't believe in God and that's bad."

I felt as if she had just raised

her hand and slapped me, letting her oversized, plastic heart ring dig its way across my cheek. It wasn't the words that ran painfully across my face, but the completely unsympathetic look in hers. It would have been one thing if her mom had made her give this message despite much protest, and she had come to me, tears welling in her eyes as she delivered the news. But she just stared at me with those hard, blue eyes as if she hoped the pebble line would truly burst into flame and drag me down to the depths of hell where I belonged.

"Why?" my voice squeaked while my hands balled themselves up into tiny fists.

"Because that's bad, and my mom says she doesn't want me to be like you."

I could feel the sharp plastic edges of her ring cutting out my own heart. I had devoted all of my time to becoming the antithesis of bad. I always did my homework. I did whatever my parents told me; I never talked back or misbehaved. I knew better than that. I knew what happened to girls who misbehaved. I prided myself in my ability to be an absolute people pleaser, a little ornament for adults to dote on. The only rude thing I could remember doing so far was

defying to say 'Ma'am' to an insistent teacher. That was only because my dad said that I didn't have to. He offered to go to the school and straighten the problem out, but I was embarrassed as it was, so I began to mumble something with a faint m-sound every time I answered her yes or no. I had never even told Laura about that; there was no way her mom could have found out. What had I done wrong?

Without giving me a chance to protest further, Laura turned her back on me and walked towards her porch. I grabbed her shoulder to make her stay, but she pushed my hand away and walked inside to her mother's comforting arms and agreement to let her walk all the way to the church playground so she could meet more decent friends. I stood there on her artificial grass, watching the screened wood door crash shut. Then I walked back to my yard, feeling the fire against my soles as I let my feet drag across the pebble line. I went back to my

swing set and lay my belly on the plastic swing bottom; my head faced downward, fingers tracing the dirt. I lay on that swing and cried until snot was dripping down my face, and my head was pounding so terribly, that I couldn't squeeze out another drop. I'm sure my mom looked out the window and saw me lying across the swing, but it was not unusual for her to find me hanging from some new angle as if it were a trapeze. A while later, when she noticed I hadn't moved much more than an inch in a space of time which felt like years, she ran down the squeaky steps of our porch to me. She put her hand on my back. "Honey what's wrong?"

I didn't say anything at first. Then I looked up at her and remembered that this was all her fault. She was the one who had made me this way. It was her fault that the majority of the kids in my class at Moody Elementary stayed away from me; being unreligious in the Bible belt was like having a contagious disease.

"I hate you" I spouted out at her. She kept her hand resting on my back but her face scrunched tightly as if she was the one who had just been burned. Then I began spurring out words in a horrible jumble, explaining what had happened, tasting the salt which had dried in the corners of my mouth.

"You're not bad," she assured me. "Laura's not bad

Wisconsin Plates

and maybe one day i will see you again
sitting on a bench in the middle of a busy concourse
with a book on your lap
and maybe you will look up
to see that i've stopped in my tracks

and maybe you will rise to your feet with a triumphant smile
and maybe you will walk with me to the coffee shop
where we will lean across the table and trade stories like children
bartering for baseball cards
and maybe we will pick up where we left off
because years aren't enough to hide behind

maybe one day i will see you again
or maybe i won't.

—Thomas Daniel

either. It's that her mom, well, most people aren't like that. Won't treat you like that." The words stumbled out of her mouth like my dad trying to make it down the hallway after having a few too many Gins before bed. She told me to go back inside and that she'd handle things. I flailed my arms out to pull her back and tumbled roughly forward onto my back. She pulled me back up to my feet and I stomped off into the house.

I looked out the window and watched my mom cross into the neighboring property. Laura's mom, rather surprisingly and in favor of her goodwill, allowed her admittance into their house. I can only imagine how their conversation went; all I know is that my mom came back shaking her head, her hands too balled into fists. She couldn't beat Laura's mom, who was thick with curves that came equipped with confidence and a knowledge that everything she said was ultimately right. My mom, on the other hand, was as thin as she was meek, with hair that fell to her bottom, just like mine. We weren't allowed to cut our hair. At least I wasn't. I'm not sure if it was a rule for my mom, or if mom's even had rules, but she never did. One of the only things that my dad did believe in was that women should be natural.

I remember I once got into a fight with Laura over looks

and the issue of wearing her hair in bangs. She asked me why I didn't have bangs; everyone had bangs. I told her I didn't know; I'd never had them. Laura, who had front bangs cut right above her eyes since she could crawl, insisted that I was wrong. All girls had bangs, you just had to keep cutting them or they would grow out. She insisted that I had foolishly let mine grow out. Now this made no sense to me, if I had ever had

bangs that fell over my forehead, I was sure that I would have remembered. I puzzled over this for the majority of second grade.

Laura had bangs and God, and I didn't. That was why we couldn't be friends. I never wanted those things in the first place though. Bangs were for girls who were trying to hide their big foreheads and not pretty girls like me, like my dad told me. And God was for people who be-



Photography by Nourah Said



Photography by April Staton

lieved that all of the things in a huge book were real. And I knew a lot about books, I was an avid reader from an early age. My dad drove a truck and would stop at all of the different libraries along his route. Every Monday he'd bring home a garbage bag filled with books and spread them out onto our living room floor. I would eat them up, gorging upon the words until my temples were throbbing. So for me, the whole God idea was as perplexing as

bangs. I had recently finished reading *The Hobbit* with my dad. I didn't go around telling people that they were crazy because they didn't believe in the power of the one ring. Why did they tell me that there was something wrong with me because I didn't believe that a man could walk on water in real life? I thought it was a nice story, but Jesus was about as real and a part of my daily life as Bilbo Baggins.

So I sat in the low lying

limbs of the Dogwood trees in my backyard and read. I watched Laura jump on her trampoline with her new friend, another blonde girl down the street, Ally. I made a secret club, the Laura-hater club, and initiated my sister into it. That made me feel better. Laura moved away a half a year later. I don't know why, I didn't get to ask. But once the big moving truck pulled out of her driveway, I crossed into her yard and did cartwheels across the grass.

Surrounded

Kelly Parrish

Fiction

He swung his paws to the rhythm of his heartbeats. His claws dug into the mushy ground; mud squished up between his pads. The cold morning air rushed deep into his chest and puffed out in misty clouds.

The capsule on his collar dug into his neck, the leather cylinder with the lieutenant's message almost hidden in his wiry, tawny hair. The air had been thick with the smell of human sweat since they'd landed on Normandy Beach a week ago. Now the scent came from behind him, from his tall trainer's platoon, and from the enemy on both sides.

Hermes sucked in deep breaths of air, searching for the familiar scent. He was supposed to find the short trainer, but couldn't detect a single trace of his smell. He'd rolled away in a Jeep over a day ago, and Hermes hadn't smelled him since the night before, and then only for a second, when the wind had been blowing from the beach.

Dry leaves crunched under his paws. He had to creep along, laying each foot down gradually. He couldn't make a sound. The enemy was close, hunkering in holes only twenty yards to his left; hiding in a cottage a couple

of hundred feet to his right.



Lieutenant Browning hadn't realized until 0300 that morning that they were surrounded. During the night the Germans troops had circled them, dug in, and were lying wait until daylight. Supply lines were cut off and the scouts estimated that they were outnumbered three to one. The radio had been hit by a bursting mortar shell the evening before and would not call out.

So the lieutenant ordered Sergeant Meyers to send out the Airedale. He had a lot of faith in the terriers; they were fast, smart, reliable—and not included on casualty lists.

He asked Meyers what chance the messenger dog had of getting through. "Not much, sir. It's been 36 hours since they saw Squirrel last, and he left in a Jeep, so there won't be much scent trail."

Wondering why he asked... as if he had another option... the lieutenant scribbled a message on a sheet of paper, then rolled it up and slipped it into the leather capsule. Sergeant Meyers unleashed the Airedale. Hermes pranced with excitement, wagging his stubby tail and perking his ears up at every sound. When Meyers knelt

next to him and cinched the collar on, he licked his unshaven chin. The tall trainer murmured in his ear for a minute, then slapped him on the rump. He bounded off into the woods.

Hermes had learned patience while stalking cats as a puppy. If he tried to go too fast and rustled leaves or snapped a twig, the cat would wake up, or in this case, shoot at him. He crouched low, eased each paw onto the ground, and tried not to pant. The soldiers in the cottage were eating sausage, so he was keeping closer to them, since they would be less alert than the men in the foxholes. The enemy troops were not as dense on the other side of the platoon, but the smell of his short trainer had come from this direction.

There was a dangerously open patch of grass by the cottage. Hermes ducked under a bush at its edge, then dashed across and into the trees on the other side. He didn't see the German guard jerk up. He didn't see the rifle come up, the greasy finger tighten on the trigger. He didn't see it because the guard didn't fire. He knew he was seeing a messenger dog but memories of his own Airedale, Skoll, flooded across

his eyes. And then Hermes was gone. Leaves brushed against his coat. Tree trunks slid past.

At the edge of the thicket, he came to a creek. The easiest way to cross would be the footbridge, but a soldier was slouched by it, clutching a rifle. He circled and found a place where the trees grew out to the water's edge. A branch extended most of the way across. He lapped at the water before plunging in.

Within seconds he could no longer reach the bottom and had to paddle. The swift current swept him along, and when he finally emerged on the other bank, he was around a bend and out of sight of the bridge guard. While he was shaking the wa-

ter out of his coat, he caught his first whiff of the other trainer. The smell came from almost straight ahead.

The grass was stiff and over Hermes' head, but he plowed through, the smell of the short trainer growing stronger by the step. He ran up a bank, barked once, and leapt high over a barbed wire fence. The fresh earth slipped out from under his paws and he tumbled into a foxhole and onto his short trainer.

Nimble fingers extracted the damp note, unrolled it, and disappeared. Somebody placed a bowl of cold water at his feet. Another finger appeared at the end of his nose,

loaded with C-ration pea-

nut butter. Hermes licked it off. The yummy glue stuck to his teeth and beard. He sat there on the floor of the foxhole, dripping wet, licking his lips, with the men laughing all around him.

His trainer knelt close and cooed his name. Thick fingers scratched his itchy chest and rubbed the tender spot behind his ears.

The commander of Squirrel's platoon read Lieutenant Browning's message and radioed another company. They came in behind the Germans and, after several hours of battle, forced them to retreat. It was another small victory for the Allies—not that Hermes cared, lying at his trainer's feet that night.



Photography by Alexander Welsh



My Brother, My Sister by Abigail O'Brien

Creative
Nonfiction

Wrecks

Kelly Parrish

Her left eyelid was welded half shut, the iris wedged in the outside corner. Her thin white hair sprayed out in every direction except the one it was supposed to. Fat slobbered every which way and a sparse white beard and mustache poked out from her maze of wrinkles.

She walked up to me in the laundromat and asked for a favor in her quiet undertone. I thought she was going to beg a few dollars but all she wanted was to talk to somebody—"for two minutes" she assured me.

She had been in a car wreck in Missoula when she was 22 years old, 33 years

before. She had been unconscious for days when she woke up and "they'd cut this part of my brain"—she dragged her finger outward from the center of her forehead over her disfigured left eye—"out, but my memory just moved over here." She tapped her right temple. I told her she was lucky. My own mom died in a traffic accident when I was seven.

She babbled on for a lot longer than two minutes, giggling shrilly at the end of each sentence. Before the wreck, she had been to college in Africa and London. She lived in Helena now, and walked the streets most of

the day—just rambled and poured her story out on whoever would listen. She told me about her adventures in Africa and the witty things she had said to her cousin, mostly so softly that I could not make out the words. I quit trying to when she told me she had gotten drunk one night and woke up lying naked on the main street, a policeman poking her in the face with his stick. She guffawed at that story and seemed to be proud of it.

She finally wandered off, after asking one last favor: that I say hello if I ever saw her again.



Branch by Alexander Welsh

Smart? Or Just a Hard Worker?

Julius Tate

Creative
Nonfiction

My mother raised five kids on her own. She worked two jobs and, still, we found ourselves in a two bed-room apartment that couldn't have been any bigger than 700 square feet. It was small. What's more, my dad was selling drugs and my uncle—my dad's brother—was in prison. Needless to say, he wasn't much help back then. And while my mother didn't have the slightest clue as how to raise five kids, she knew—for some instinctive reason—education was the way to go. So, her kids went to some of the best schools the state of Alabama had to offer, which usually meant us moving to housing projects zoned near rich school districts.

My first day of class at my new "rich" school was a huge eye-opener. You see, until then my siblings and I had attended—to put it eloquently—"crappy" schools. Our books were torn, the computers were old, and most of us had no clue as to what you called that little thing that sat next to the monitor (I later learned it was called a mouse).

I'll never forget my first day. "Ju," my teacher begins, "what was the last story your old class read out of

this reader?" Easy enough, I thought. So, I took my massive reading book and turned to about page 45. My teacher's face said it all; she felt sorry for me. I didn't know why at first, not until she showed me the story they were on.

"Okay, honey," she said, "this is the story we're reading." And would you believe she flipped to page 300 (out of about 400)? So you can imagine my surprise when I learned that my new classmates were almost done with the whole book.

At my old school, I was a top dog. I made A's and B's, my teachers loved me, and I stood out. At this new school, would you believe they initially wanted to put me in special education? It was definitely an uphill battle. That year, I worked my butt off. And eventually, I would become one of the most successful in my class. I even scored high enough on standardized tests to be considered "gifted".

But, when I look back on those early, transitional days, I often wonder how different my life would be had my mother not relocated us to a better learning environment. It's actually a little scary when I think about it. I highly

doubt I would be the science geek I am today, or for that matter, as "smart."

Here's why...

Malcolm Gladwell has written an amazing book, *Outliers*, where he attempts to answer the question what makes some people stand out—or in this case, smart. (In science, the term outlier is used to describe anything that lies outside the norm, kind of like really, really smart people.) Gladwell gives several different theories and explanations, but the one that caught my eye was the idea that intelligence is not fixed. It is, according to him, something that can be enhanced. He thinks of it more as 'potential'. Think about this for a moment: standardized exams test subject matter that builds on previous years of educational content. In order to score, say, in the 99th percentile, it's assumed that you'll answer a certain number of questions correctly, which also means you've learned a certain amount of material. Now, that's not to say that innate, raw talent doesn't contribute; I'm going to suggest, however, that it doesn't play as much of a role as one might think.

What would happen, for example, if students who

had the potential to score in the 99th percentile weren't given the opportunity to be properly educated? For starters, would they still score as high? And if not—because they weren't adequately educated—would their self-efficacy and self-esteem be affected and, consequently, their dreams, hopes, and ultimately what they become in life? I think so.

I believe things would be drastically different. In fact, many of us associate certain dreams and aspirations with certain levels of intelligence. If you're smart, then you become a doctor. If you're not, then you don't. And being "smart" is backed by all sorts of positive reinforcement—the biggest one being standardized tests. If the SAT says you're smart, then by golly, you're smart!

I disagree. While I'm willing to concede everyone isn't born with the same raw talent, that doesn't mean others can't reach the same level of "intelligence"—or for that matter, surpass it.

The reason is, being "smart" by the numbers isn't as much about innate, God-given ability as you might think. Instead, it has more to do with work ethic and interest. How much are you willing to work for something you want—or to put it another way, how much harder do you work for things that interest you? My guess is, pretty darn hard. So, why aren't

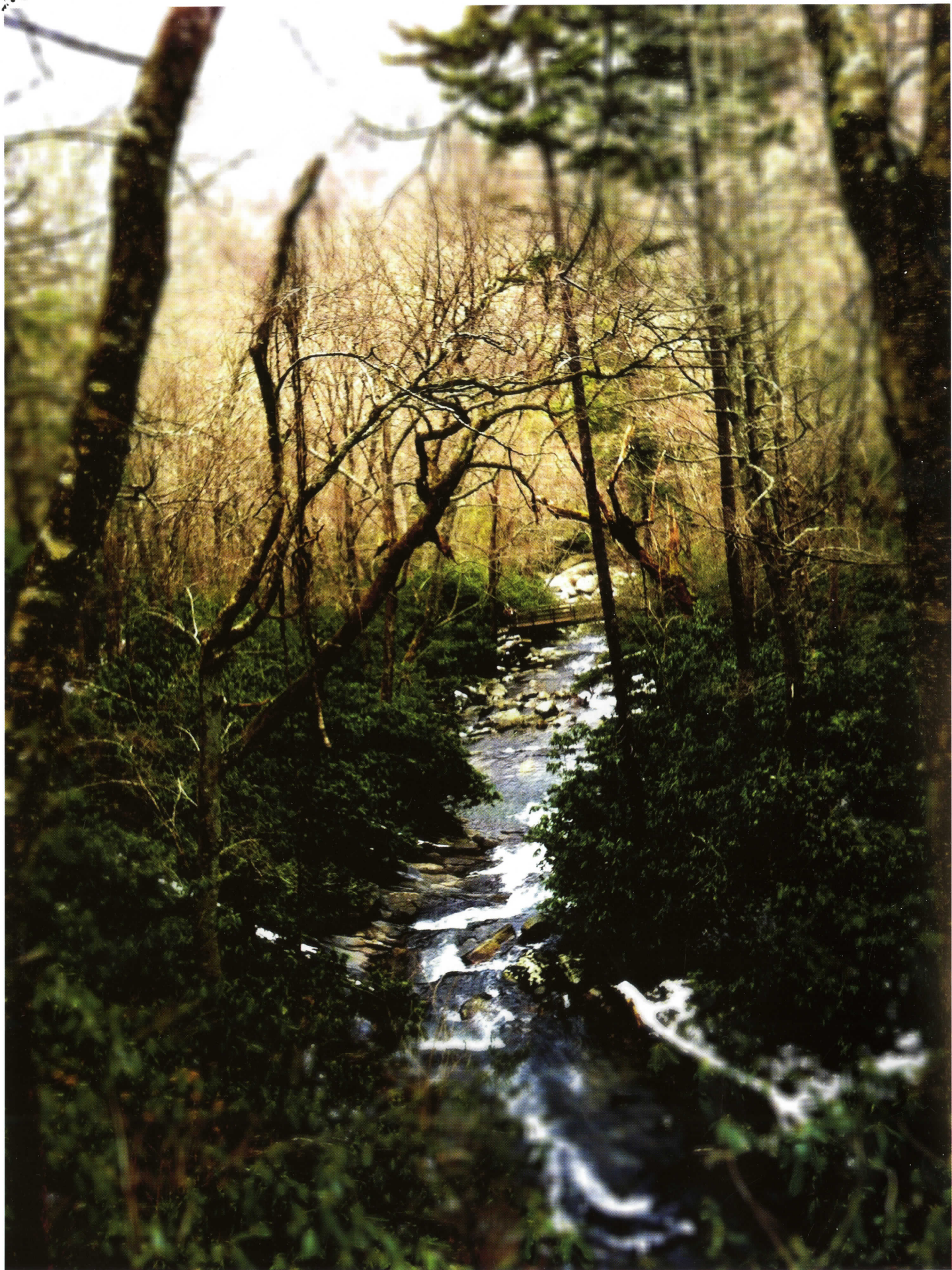
most students scoring extraordinarily high on SAT's and ACT's? Well, when it comes to school, a lot of students just don't have a focus or passion; they are pursuing an end without any concern for the means. It's not that they aren't smart enough, they just don't care—at least not to the point that they're willing to give up things like Playstation or football or cheerleading.

Think about professional athletes for a moment. Do you think Michael Jordan is as great as he is just because of raw talent? What if I told you the man reports that after every single practice he shot close to 1,000 free throws? Does that change your perception at all? The reason we're so quick to label someone as great or smart is because we don't see what goes on behind closed doors. We just see the finished product. Michael Jordan is considered an anomaly because we saw him, once a week or so, doing things no one man should be able to do. In addition, we say National Spelling Bee Champions are brilliant because of what appears to be an innate gift. Once again, we rarely hear mention of the road it takes to get there. I once saw a documentary on some of those kids and would you believe they spent up to eight hours a day preparing for the Bee? Eight hours a day! My whole

point is, academic success, or being 'smart' isn't as fixed from birth as one might think, especially when it's defined by profession. If you're the average person with the average brain, according to Carol Dweck PhD, author of the book *Mindset*, you can do just about anything you want. The question is, though, are you willing to put forth the required effort? And by "effort" I don't mean waiting until your senior year of college to start taking your education seriously. It has to start from the beginning, with focus. (Once again, this is all assuming some minimum level of cognitive development.)

There are likely two primary reasons why the average person hasn't achieved the level of success he or she desires: 1) he/she doesn't work hard enough, and/or 2) he/she is lacking exposure to the foundation needed to achieve the desired level of success, which means he or she may have to start with the basics and work his/her way up. It's a heck of a lot of work, but if they want it badly enough, they will succeed; and the sense of reward and accomplishment will inevitably follow.

So, the next time you run across someone with what seems like an intellectual gift, more than likely it's not because they're smarter than you. They're probably just a hard worker.



Off the Smokey Mountain Trail by Zack Terry

Museum by Susan Matassa

My eyes

see the marble where

your lips

blew fresh dust away from
the delicate curve
so close that when I
breath in, the particles tickle

my nose

is just where yours was when you
saw that this curve was
good and cupped her breast
of stone with

your hand

was close to mine in size but
calloused by a devotion
so real that now
I can see it with

my eyes

watch as you move around
her in a dance with only one
passionate partner whose
fingertips brush

my hand

is snatched away as I am unjustly
escorted from the building.
There are no rules about
not touching the artist.

—Susan Matassa



Photography by Jeffrey Bolan

An Eye for an Eye

David Weston

"You're serious. You really wanna kill him."

Lonnie flicked his dying cigarette onto the gravel and smothered it with the tip of his boot. He looked at his younger brother solemnly.

"That's what I'm sayin', yeah."

Ray scratched his beard. "How long you been thinking about doing this?" He watched Lonnie glance up at the full, Mississippi moon. It stared down at the sleeping trailer park like an all-seeing eye.

"I don't know, maybe two days ago, when we was in court."

Ray took a nervous swig from the can of Pabst he was holding. "I mean, I don't wanna question your ethics or nothin', but I don't think killin' him would fix anything."

Lonnie's face darkened. He pushed himself off the side of the dirty double-wide he'd been leaning against and paced back and forth, staring at the ground, thinking. Ray had seen him pace like this once or twice before, and it usually meant someone got hurt. When Lonnie got to thinking, violence usually followed.

"It ain't about fixin' anything," Lonnie said. "It's about . . . it's about an eye fer an eye." He made big sweeping gestures with his arms to emphasize this point.

"An eye for an eye?" Ray

said.

"Yeah, you know, like the Bible says," Lonnie chuckled, hoping his brother finally understood him. Ray still wasn't convinced. He knew Lonnie didn't care much for religion. Most Sunday mornings, he was so hung over that he would just lie in bed until Pappy grabbed his ankles and pulled him onto the floor. Even that didn't work sometimes. If he was sober, he usually went, but he was never happy about it, and when Mamma and Pappy weren't around, he'd curse and complain until he felt better. As for Ray, he always liked church: the singing, the stories. When he was twelve, there was a span of time when he thought God was calling him to be a missionary, but when Pappy told him horror stories

about missionaries who were speared through the guts on beaches or eaten by cannibal tribes, he suddenly didn't feel like that was what God had in store for his life. He still thought highly of Jesus, though. He thought he would be a pretty cool guy to have a few beers with.

Ray cleared his throat. "But I thought Jesus said killin' was wrong, didn't he?" Lonnie's brow furrowed. He stopped pacing and took a few steps toward Ray. Ray continued nervously, "I mean, he told us to turn the other cheek and love our enemies, right? We can't just ignore that . . . right?"

Lonnie stared at Ray for a long time. Ray could almost see the rusty, alcohol-soaked cogs turning behind his brother's deep blue eyes. After a few moments, Lonnie



Phone Home by Frank Orona

finally answered. Starting slowly, he pronounced every syllable of his response carefully. "Well, it's okay as long as it's for the purpose of justice." He paused dramatically to let the words sink in. The spring crickets chirped uneasily in the silence. Lonnie continued, "I mean, you can't just go killin' people just to kill people, you gotta have a reason, a good reason, like . . . well, you know, if you was killin' Nazis, like Grandpappy did, or Japs or Muslim terrorists, then that would be a good reason cause you would know you was fightin' evil!" Lonnie nearly shouted the last word. Ray glanced around to make sure no one was listening in on them. Lonnie seemed too drunk to care.

"I think you're losing sight of the big picture," Lonnie continued, running his fingers through his long, greasy hair. "Sam killed Brett Campbell. You and I know that, Jessie knows that, Judge Parsons knows that, hell, the whole town knows that. And you know deep down in your gut he did it for a fuckin' noble reason. He was tryin' to protect Jessie! He loves her, Ray, and he sure as hell wasn't gonna let a goodfernothin' sonofabitch like Brett Campbell take advantage of her!" Lonnie's face had twisted into a furious, contorted mess.

Ray thought he heard a screen door creak open nearby. "Look, Lonnie," he whispered, "don't you

think we should talk about this later? Inside, maybe?" He looked at his brother pleadingly.

Lonnie didn't move. "Are you even listenin' to me? I want you to answer 'Yes' or 'No.' Did Brett Campbell deserve to die?"

Ray wasn't sure. There was a part of him that suspected Brett Campbell of wronging his sister in some way. But there was another part of him that knew Jessie had a history of lying in order to get what she wanted. And Jessie's anger was like a wildfire. One tiny spark could set the whole forest ablaze in a matter of minutes. In this case, she could've been angry at Brett for something no one else knew about and quickly thought of the worst thing she could accuse him of. She was 17, after all, and immature for her age. She probably didn't think twice about how serious her accusation was or what the repercussions would be.



Ray had been sitting in the rocking chair on the front porch when it'd happened. He'd just gotten home from work, and he was trying to take a nap, despite the blistering heat, when Jessie ran up to the trailer bawling her eyes out, dirty blonde pigtails flying left and right. She was running so fast, she tripped over her own feet and sprawled onto the ground face first. Ray didn't have much time to react before Sam came stomping

out of the trailer. Sam was the oldest of the family and it was the general opinion of women everywhere that he was the handsomest. Since Pappy had gotten old, to the point that it was difficult for him to move around, he had passed most of the family responsibilities over to Sam. Sam had always loved his family, particularly Jessie, who was the youngest, so he took on the role of father with joy and enthusiasm.

Sam jumped down the porch steps in one leap, ran to Jessie, and knelt down next to her. "Hey, what's the matter with you?" he asked with a voice that was both stern and comforting. He put his large arms around her thin shoulders. Jessie sat up, tears streaming out of her big blue eyes and down her face. Ray noticed that Jessie's face was pretty even when it was covered in dirt, maybe even more so.

She tried to answer between sobs. "It's that Brett Campbell . . ." Sam's body stiffened. Jessie's breath hitched and she hesitated before continuing. "We was just sittin' in his room, listening to music and . . . he attacked me. He," she swallowed hard, "he tried to rape me."

Those words hit Ray like a shotgun blast. He jumped out of his chair, wondering if he should join Sam at her side. In the six months that Brett and Jessie had been dating, he couldn't remember ever seeing Brett Campbell show

any meanness toward his little sister. Never. In fact, he had believed up until that point that Brett had been good to her, better than some of the scumbags she'd dated in the past.

However, he knew Sam and Brett had never gotten along well. Sam was very protective of Jessie and very suspicious of any boy who she was with, especially since he had become the man of the house. Brett often teased Sam about how protective he was and loved to make Sam look stupid in front of Jessie. Ray stood frozen with indecision.

Sam grabbed Jessie by the shoulders and turned her to face him. He stared her right in the eyes and asked, "Jess, are you tellin' me the truth?"

Her eyes widened with outrage, "Am I tellin' you the truth? Am I—" She pushed Sam away from her. "What kind of fuckin' question is that!? Course I am!"

Sam looked at his sister with a new urgency. He pulled her closer. "Jess, tell me where he is."

"He's back at his trailer, hidin' out probly."

At that moment, Ray saw something click in Sam's demeanor. It was like a dark veil had lowered in front of his face. He stood up and walked stiffly back into the trailer. Jessie looked confused for a moment. She glanced at Ray, then Sam burst out of the trailer with a shotgun in his hand. He cocked it in one swift motion.

"Sam, what're you doing?" Jessie stammered, wiping the tears from her eyes. "Sam!" She jumped up and ran after him. Ray watched them as they disappeared around a trailer. A few minutes later, he heard three quick shotgun blasts, a scream, and then silence. The rest had all been described in court.



"You know Bud Rushing?" Lonnie asked, pulling Ray out of his daze.

"No."

"Well, he's on probation now, but he spent two years in the state penitentiary after Judge Parsons convicted him. You wanna know why the judge sent him to prison?"

"Why?"

"The judge thought he was fuckin' his wife, so he called his state trooper buddies and had 'em pull Bud over, plant some marijuana in his car, and just like that he's off to prison."

Ray thought for a moment. "Well, was he?"

Lonnie looked confused.

"Was he what?"

"You know. Screwin' the judge's wife?"

"Of course not," Lonnie yelled. "That's the whole point of the story!"

"Oh," Ray muttered.

"So," Lonnie said, stepping closer to Ray, "are you gonna help me out or not?"

There were a few minutes of silence as Ray took a last thoughtful swig of his beer, crushed the can in his fist, and tossed it on the ground.

"I just don't know what to think, Lonnie, I really don't."

Lonnie grabbed Ray by the shoulders and stood just inches from his face. "Ray, our brother is going to spend eight fuckin' years of his life in prison for killing a guy who tried to rape our sister! Does any part of that seem fair to you? Now, are you just gonna let that happen? Are you gonna stand by while some self-righteous, crooked-as-hell judge spits on the family name? Or are you man enough to do something about it?"

Ray couldn't look at his brother; he stared at the ground instead. He generally trusted Lonnie. He had never let him down in the past. And with Sam gone, Lonnie was technically in charge. But something was still bothering him about the whole situation, chewing at his insides. With a deep breath, he pushed the nagging feeling to the back of his mind.

"I've listened to your side . . ."

"Uh-huh . . ."

" . . . and I've decided to help you."

Lonnie looked excited. "That's great, Ray, I knew you wouldn't let your family down!" He went in for a hug, but Ray held him back.

"But I'm not gonna hurt anybody, you hear me?"

"Yeah, I understand."

Lonnie smiled a big crooked grin. "You won't have to hurt nobody if you don't wanna. You leave that to me."

"Good. You wanna kill Judge Parsons, you do it yourself. Now, how are you planning on doing this thing?"



Lonnie and Ray were crouched behind the shrubbery that formed a perimeter around the judge's large mansion. Both of them were armed, Lonnie carrying his hunting rifle and Ray with a pistol shoved into the back of his pants. Their truck was parked a few blocks down the road; they had walked the rest of the way through moonlit woods and backyards.

The brothers peered out at the carefully manicured backyard with its swing set, swimming pool, and large screened-in porch. The windows were all dark.

"Well," Ray whispered, "now what?"

Lonnie surveyed the backyard. "First, we gotta disable the security system."

Earlier, he had confidently explained to Ray how his buddy Earl, an electrician, had told him all about home security systems and how to disarm them. Ray was doubtful of Earl's claims. He was a general electrician after all, not a home security guru. But Lonnie was sure Earl knew his stuff. So, now, as Ray watched, Lonnie pushed his way through

the bushes and tiptoed (Ray didn't understand why this was necessary) through the grass to the side of the house.

Ray waited a minute or two. He could see Lonnie's shadow moving on the side of the house as he worked on disarming the security system. Ray felt his whole body tense up, just waiting for a loud alarm to sound, but a minute later, Lonnie emerged from the shadows and waved for Ray to come on. Ray crouched down and shuffled his way across the yard, around the pool and

into the screened-in porch where Lonnie already had the door open.

Ray cupped his hands to the window and peered inside. Everything was dark and still. Lonnie gently closed the porch door so that it wouldn't make a sound, then he crept over to Ray.

"How are we gonna get in?" Ray whispered.

Lonnie pointed where Ray was standing. "Move your feet," Lonnie commanded.

Ray stepped back and Lonnie lifted the welcome mat. A small silver key shined

Guitar Concert

A hush falls over the audience
between the curtain's rise and the first notes,
full of anticipation like a cloud-thick sky
at winter's door, asking,

"Will it snow?" and

"Will they cancel school?"

In that moment, eyes widen, ears sharpen,
and we wait.

Bows and fingers freeze where they are poised,
leaving just enough time for our minds to clear
before they paint their images,
bright and dusky, joyous yet pained,
with their endless palettes of notes.

As soon as the silence is broken,
we settle back into our seats,
content to listen to the melodies
until they bow and we stand to leave,
but as I walk home, I find myself
wondering if maybe the concert would have been better
if it were all idealistic hush
and none of the music that is reality.

—Megan Reynolds

in the moonlight.

"Jackpot," Lonnie chuckled to himself.

Ray looked questioningly at him. "How'd you know that was there?"

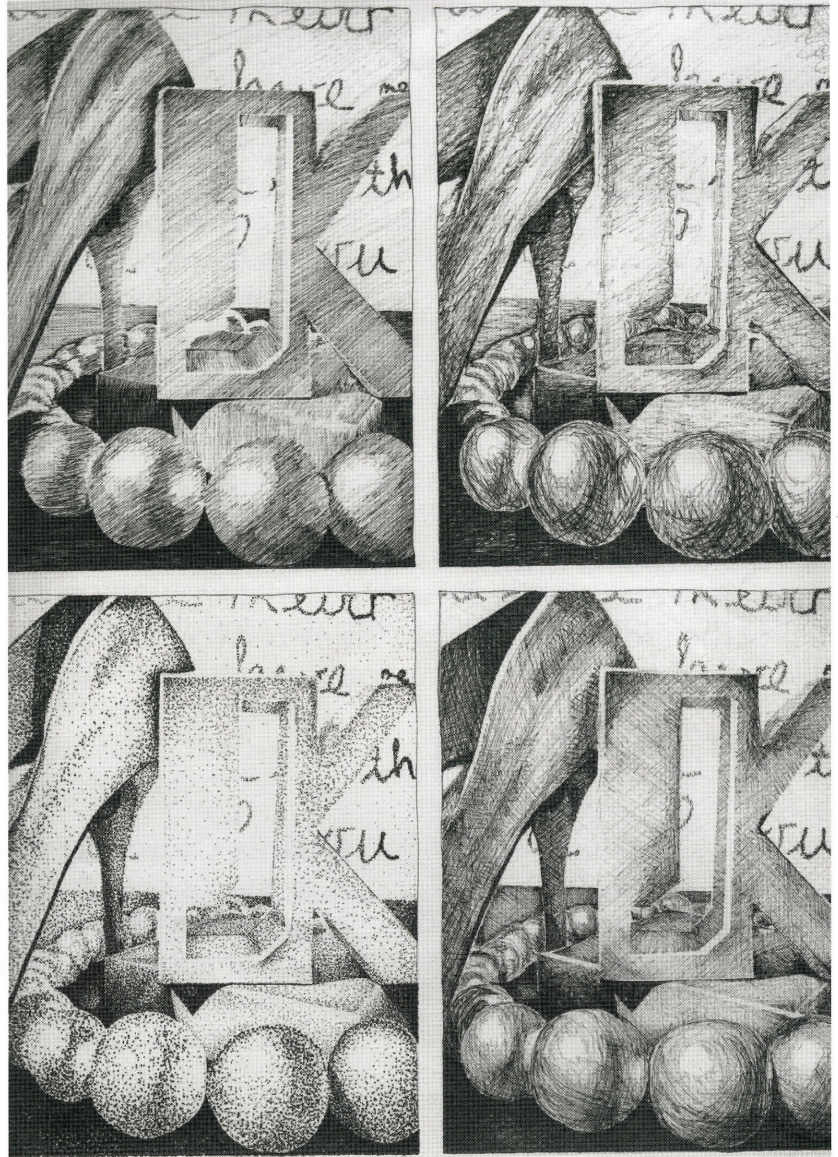
"I didn't," Lonnie scratched his nose and stared at his boots.

Ray's eyebrows furrowed. "Well, then, what were you gonna do if it wasn't there?"

Lonnie shrugged his shoulders. "I don't know, bust the door down or something." He slipped the key into the lock, gritting his teeth in extreme concentration. Ray rolled his eyes and crossed his arms, wishing he were at home watching the race.

The doorknob turned and Lonnie pushed. The door swung open easily. They stared into the dark kitchen, allowing their eyes to adjust. Ray heard a small sound as Lonnie clicked the safety off of his rifle.

"Now, we find the judge," Lonnie whispered. There was a silver gleam in his eyes Ray didn't like. Lonnie stepped over the threshold and melted into the blackness. Ray took a deep breath, said a silent prayer, and followed. Lonnie motioned for Ray to shut the door behind them, and Ray obeyed. The darkness swallowed them up. There was no turning back now, Ray thought. They were in. Ray reached back and pulled the pistol, a Sig Saur that Pappy had given him for his 21st birthday, out of the small of his back. He cocked



Repetition by Jamie Krywicki

it. The noise seemed to echo across the room and into the dark hallway.

Lonnie crept around into the cavernous living room, rifle pointed blindly into the dark. They turned the corner and Lonnie motioned over his shoulder for Ray to get closer. Ray did, trying to step as lightly as he could, but his thick boots still clacked on the floor no matter how softly he tread.

"This is the bedroom,"

Lonnie whispered calmly, pointing down the long hallway. Ray stared as hard as he could, but he could barely make out the outline of a door. It just looked like an ordinary door, though. How does he know that's the judge's bedroom? He was about to ask, but Lonnie interrupted him.

"I'm gonna go kick it down. Watch my back," Lonnie said quickly.

Ray's eyes widened. "Wait,

don't you think you should--" But that's all he had time to say before Lonnie went barreling down the hallway like a charging bear. When he was almost to the end of the hall, he took a small leap, pointed his boot at the door near the knob, and kicked it with all 250 pounds of his weight.

The door flew open. Ray rushed up behind him, gun drawn. His mind was in such a panic. He had completely forgotten what Lonnie had told him to do. He felt like he needed to say something.

"Freeze!" he screamed stupidly into the dark room. He saw the dim outline of the judge, a fat, balding man, sit up in his bed, just in time to get a solid whack in the head from Lonnie's rifle butt. The judge's wife let out a bloody scream. Ray was tempted to cover his ears, but instead, he jumped over the bed and pointed his pistol at her head. She put her hands up in the air, still screaming.

"Don't you move, don't you frickin' move!" His mind was screaming at him. What the fuck are you doing? You're pointing a goddamn gun at the head of a woman you don't even know! Jesus, are you insane?! He ignored his mind for the moment, grabbing the woman by the forearm and dragging her out of bed. She fell to the floor pitifully.

Ray glanced up to see how Lonnie was doing. He was dragging the judge, who

had somehow remained conscious after the blows Lonnie had delivered, to the wall with the long barrel of his gun pressed firmly to the side of the judge's bald and bleeding head.

A sharp pain bolted up Ray's leg.

"Ow! What the!?" He glanced down and saw that Mrs. Parsons had lifted his pants leg and was desperately sinking her teeth into his ankle. He grabbed her long black hair and pulled hard. She screeched and let go of his leg. Thank God for that, Ray thought, as he swung her across the room and dragged her next to where Lonnie had her husband.

Lonnie turned to look at Ray, and Ray almost jumped. He hardly recognized his brother. Lonnie's face had twisted into a crazy mask that made Ray very uneasy. Lonnie smiled widely, showing what was left of his teeth.

"Good job! Now go upstairs and get the kids."

"What!" Ray looked appalled. "Why?"

"They could call the cops or run to a neighbor's house. Get 'em, hurry!"

"You want me to," Ray's voice stuttered, "Ki-Kill them?"

"What? No! I want you to bring 'em down here!"

Ray felt relieved. He took a deep breath and rushed out of the doorway, but before he could get very far, he ran straight into something. He

fell awkwardly, somehow maintaining enough balance to catch himself before his head smacked the floor. Turning around, Ray saw a scared-looking boy in pajamas pointing a pistol at his head. Without thinking, Ray swung his own pistol on the boy and fired three quick shots into his chest.

The boy fell back, slamming his tiny head on the hardwood floor. He was dead before he hit the ground. His gun fell from his hands and only when it went clacking across the floor, did Ray realize that it was plastic.

In the bedroom, Mrs. Parsons wailed uncontrollably. "My baby! Oh, my baby! God, no, please, not my baby!!"

Ray stared at the widening pool of blood creeping from under the boy's limp body. The boy's eyes were wide open, staring directly at him, piercing his soul with their dead gaze.

Ray scrambled up. Adrenaline pulsed insanely through his veins. He leaned and almost fell before catching himself on the wall.

"Ray, you okay?" Lonnie called from the bedroom. Ray forced himself to answer, still staring into those lifeless eyes.

"Y-yeah, yeah I'm f-f-," he was stuck on this syllable for a moment, then he closed his eyes and forced it out, "fine!" The whole world began to swirl. Ray staggered a bit, his knees shaking. His mind continued to scream at him.

You killed a fucking kid, Ray, a fucking kid! What the fuck are you doing here? Get out of here! Run away! Who cares what happens to the judge?!

"Ray!"

He didn't answer. He was still slumped against the wall.

"Ray, I need you to check upstairs to see if there are any other kids in the house."

Ray still didn't answer.

He stared. In the few seconds before his mind completely snapped, a thousand thoughts pulsed through his head. What have I done oh god why am I even here and how does Lonnie know his way around the house if he's never . . . oh god it can't . . . no no no . . . he hasn't even looked at her the whole time we've been . . . but that would explain why he wants to kill . . . this isn't about Sam it isn't even about Jessie its . . . the blood oh Jesus the blood . . .

He leaned forward, dipping the palm of his hand into the pool of blood next to the child's body. Lonnie watched, his mouth agape.

"Ray! Ray, what the hell are you doing?"

Ray stood up and held his bloody hand in front of him, palm facing outward. His face was absolutely vacant. There was nothing behind his dark eyes.

"Ray, what are you doing?" Ray cocked his head and started walking slowly toward Lonnie, his mouth twisted into a snarl.

"Is this what you wanted,

Lonnie? Is this justice?" Lonnie swung the barrel of his gun from the judge to Ray.

"Ray, I think you've lost it, buddy."

"Is this justice, Lonnie!?" Ray repeated louder this time. He took a few more steps toward Lonnie. "Answer me!"

"Ray, calm the fuck down!" Ray lifted his pistol, pointing it at his brother's chest.

"IS THIS JUSTICE, LONNIE?!"

A bright flash lit the hallway as Ray sent a bullet tearing through Lonnie's chest. Lonnie quickly returned fire. The back of Ray's head

exploded before he could let off a second shot. As he fell, Lonnie used the last of his strength to place the barrel of his rifle on the judge's temple and pull the trigger. All of this happened in a matter of seconds, then there was silence as the bodies of Lonnie, Ray, and the judge slumped to the ground.

Mrs. Parsons crawled to her husband's side and wept uncontrollably. This was the only sound that penetrated the dark silence until the wailing of police sirens a few minutes later.



Photography by Alex Welsh

Being

Kaylan T. Achee

Fiction

for: Emerson S.

Two boys, or rather adolescents. One is. One isn't. One is the stereotypical high-school senior jock sleeping with all the freshmen cheerleaders and star of the football team and et cetera, continue to list high-school level achievements till portrayal is sufficient. You know. The type. Cliché. However, the other one isn't the stereotypical nerd, nor band or computer geek nor video-game freak nor et cetera, continue to list stereotypical high-school level roles till portrayal is insufficient. The other one is just some guy with some friends and some interests and some times et cetera, continue to list some high-school normality et cetera. You know. The type. Cliché. Now, again, one could say that one is and that one isn't. Which is which? One is sexually active. One isn't. One is popular. One isn't. One partied. One didn't. Et cetera. One is the epitome of the stereotypical American high-school experience. One isn't. One is real. One isn't. Which is which?

Now, this philosophical metaphysical problem of being drives the two boys, or rather adolescents, together. An equal amount of attraction as detraction. To fight. Both are in trouble,

per say, and immediately are escorted to the principal's office. Now, the principal and the two boys. They sit and discuss. One claims that he is. The other as well. The principal states that only he is and the two boys both isn't. One boy commits suicide that night, in doubt

that he is. The other doesn't. But. Which is which?

Pause. Reflect. Consider the stereotypes presented and the minimalistic information presented. If I were you, I would choose that the not jock and that the other boy committed suicide. At least, that is what I meant



Antiquity by Amanda Bearden

to present to you so that you would come to the same conclusion. Regardless as to whether or not you did, you now know that this is the conclusion that was meant. Now. In the case that you did not come to the given conclusion, that instead the jock and that instead the not-other boy died, go back and re-interpret the story. Pause.

Now, at this point in the story, one boy is and one boy isn't. The boy who lived. However, I tell you otherwise. All to this very moment you've been reading to see why, why oh why did the boy kill himself over something oh so silly. But is it? Is being and not being so unserious? Why so serious.

I tell you, in fact, otherwise that both boys continue to be. They both is. And isn't. Both boys are alive and well in the story that they inhabit. The artificial literary construct of a world where being is forever, regardless of state of being. They both isn't. Even if both were to die, they would both live. And on the third day.

For a moment, in the introduction, while characterizing the two boys, you thought you could identify with one, didn't you. Which? Regardless, furthermore regardless, whether you did or didn't, but did you? Were you, in fact, one of the boys, temporarily. Did you, in fact, identify with one, and temporarily construct your personality just to identify? You did. Wheth-

er or not you did, I am telling you that you did. For the sake of this story. This poem. This argument. But did you?

And if the two boys are both alive and well and

dead and well and well are you well? Which of the boys are you? Are you alive? Are you dead?

Which is which?

Light Me Up

There's something beautiful about light in the darkness, something that cannot be inspired or formed by anything complex for fear of ruin. It ignites a stirring that silences my mouth and mind, enticing, hypnotizing. Never am I halted by dark in the light, but by the beams in the night, perfectly captured at a distance. The lights are daring the sky to a duel: the never-ending battle.

Now for the metaphor: I am a light and You are the vast night sky. What do you see? What did and didn't you expect to find? What do you wish you saw? These answers will prove futile, for darkness is the reference of light and light is likewise for darkness. To discover me you must first discover yourself. To discover me you must embrace us both. To discover my light, you must accept my surrounding dark as well. There is no light without dark or dark without light, the basic principle of art itself. They are hand in hand, inseparable, uncontainable.

Yet, there's something beautiful about light in the darkness, something that cannot be inspired or formed by anything complex for fear or ruin. The question is: Are you ready to plunge into the darkness to find it?

--Lindsey Robinson



Facing my Fears by Abigail O'Brien

Until We Part Bodies

The avenue asphalt was lonely
 In its dirty brackish black;
 The smell of roasted coffee beans blew
 east,
 Along with the scuffles, chatters, and moans
 Of the individual essences scattered before
 me--
 And the assiduous city pushed me to your
 home.

The bricked thunder of the closing door
 Silenced civilization like a father's hands;
 And I skulked about the wood grain, the
 lacquer,
 I sniffed the dry air, felt the taste of sugar,
 And when the corridor transfigured to a
 liberating angel,
 My mouthtop watered and my nose
 became an opiate sleeper.

My chest was tight when I saw your frame.
 The frame of your bed bending deeper
 than our thoughts,
 And I felt bold with eyes buried in dark
 luminance.
 You were numb from the coldness of linens,
 From the ever-pacing world outside your
 shadowed window,
 And from corrosion and neglect.

I rubbed firmly, my gritty palm, on your dove
 skin,
 And your eyes unchanged before my low-
 land praises;
 I climbed deep within the pile of sheets and
 comforts,
 Both hands now loaded with intent, my arms
 filled
 With blood and my muscles flexed and
 tense;
 You awoke slowly...so slowly...and I saw your
 eyes.

Whatever oils the engine of the human
 heart,
 It found itself abundant, flowing through
 your fingers;
 You were switched on, like a sleeping cat
 that caught aroma;
 Your claws were newly sharp and your eyes
 became slits.
 "Dig into me," I thought.
 "Dig deep into me," you thought.

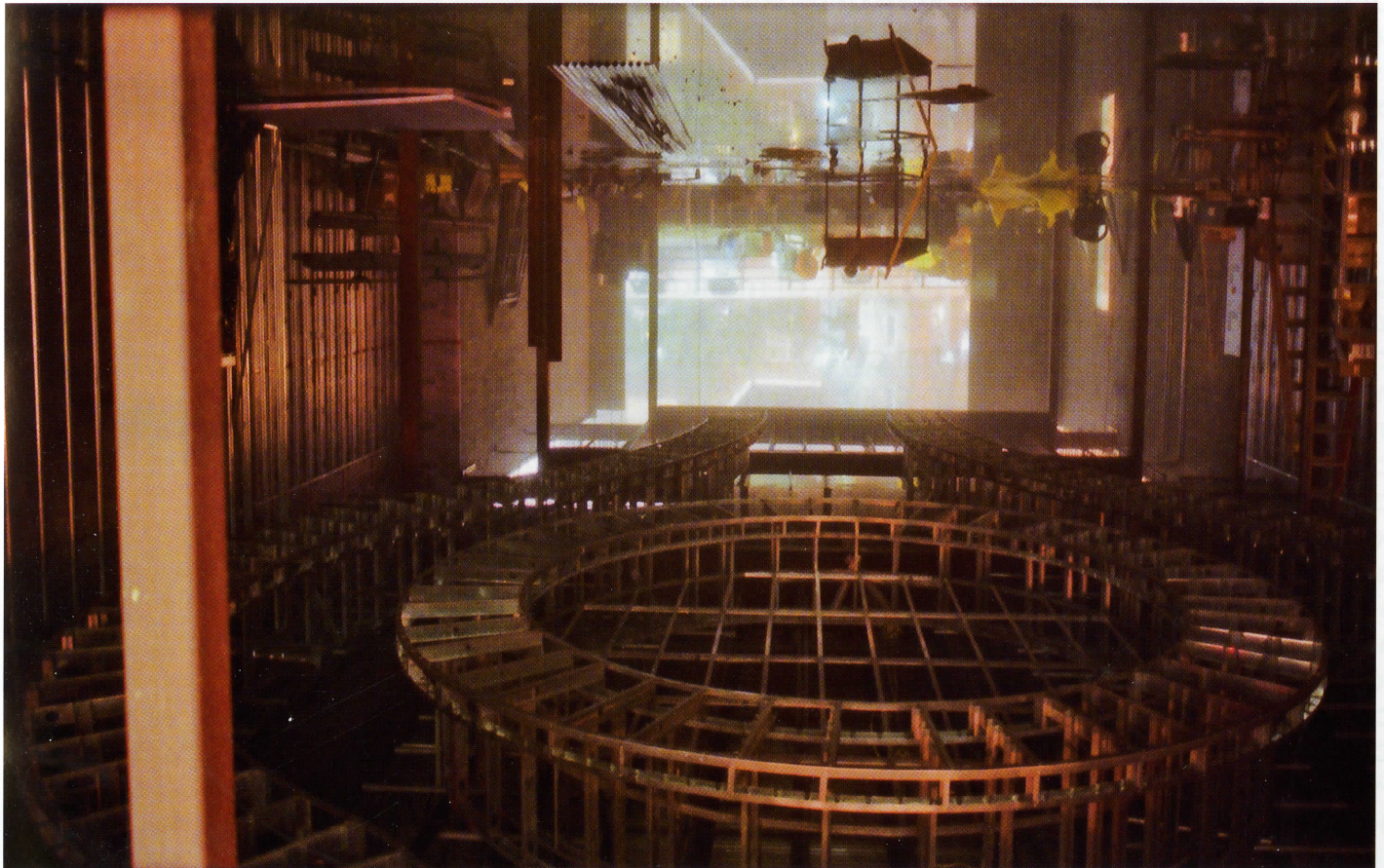
Our wet mouths were two pulps squished
 together,
 Our clothes far behind us, our skin bonded
 with adhesive;
 I was wrapped in you, you were tangled in
 me,
 And we furiously searched for orange and
 white and new.
 The world outside was still perplexed with its
 contrivances,
 While we found simplicity in joining bodies.

The day and the night were mixed like a
 cocktail,
 Shaken, iced, drank in undulating gulps,
 And we slept in the now-warm linens in our
 drunkenness.
 "What was the morning, anyway?" we
 thought.
 It was only a haunting we no longer
 believed in,
 And mixed together, lost, drifting... we
 slipped into solace.

--Brice Grayson



Vibrant Atrophy by Mallory Matthews



Inverse Reflections by Daniel Oramas

Cat Lady Certification

Scott Fenton

Fiction

A woman doesn't just become a cat lady overnight. There are rules to this thing. Guidelines. First of all, you have to own more than three. Just because you shop at Discount Shoe Warehouse in a monogrammed sweater you stitched in 1994 and have two cats waiting for you at home, you think you're a cat lady? Nice try. You're not one of us. Four or more, or out the door.

And your cats can't have normal pet names, either. Say you have four cats, but they're named Oscar, Max, Tiger, and Kitten? My response to that is **hell no, you're not a cat lady**, and God, you really named your cat Kitten? No, no, no. Blossom? Cute, if you're in the business of masking your cat's feline identity. Blossom could be an ironic name for a ferret for all I know. Show me cats named Bing Clawsby, Cleocatra, Pawcrates, Puff Catty, or Pounce de Leon and then we'll talk. Now, I'm not saying your cat's name **has** to be a carefully crafted pun to qualify, but it certainly wouldn't hurt, **fur** real. (If you're thinking of Doogie Bowser or Iggy Pup, the dog lovers' society meets down the hall. You're done here.)

You have to be able

to spout out feline-related idioms at any moment. Here's a sample conversation you should have after becoming a certified cat lady:

FRIEND

You look like you're in a hurry, pal. What's going on today?

YOU

I'm busier than a one-eyed cat watching two mouse holes.

The one idiom you **must** stay away from is – dare I say it – cat got your tongue. We, as a collective, refrain from using that phrase to respect our fallen comrade, Doris "27 Cats" Chumbley. I'm not going to get into the grisly details.

Would we dare require that every certified cat lady be single – with no plans of marriage? Of course not. This is the twenty-first century. We're a very progressive group, and we believe a cat lady can have both the love of a good man and the love of at least four cats. Granted, of course, that the man knows his place – behind the cats. The traditionalists among us disagree. They believe that becoming a cat lady is synonymous with transitioning into spinsterhood. I'd like to take this moment to challenge

our certified members to open their minds and embrace the America of 2012, where a cat lady can truly have all that and a ball of yarn.

Finally, a cat lady must be unpleasant to deal with in public places. Obviously, you'll treat your cats like the purrr-fect angels they are, but you aren't expected to be as forgiving with the rest of the world. You're expected to harass the cashiers at Petco when they don't ask your cats' names. They're pot-smoking hippies, and they aren't qualified to be selling anything other than methamphetamines. Some jerk with a Ph.D thinks he has us all figured out, you see. He says we're people who don't know how to express ourselves to others. He says we allow a relationship with a pet to take the place of relationships with other human beings. That's simply untrue. It's four or more pets. Not just one.

You look like the cat that got the cream! Don't be so sure of yourselves. The interview process is rigorous, and only the most qualified candidates will claw their way to the top. The rest will be left in the litter box. Well, don't let curiosity kill your beloved! Apply today.



Alone by Andrew Dillard



Photography by Nourah Said

Ho io grazie grandi appo te?

Clothe her.

Clothe her naked

spread open

legs shut –

close her up –

clothes are up –

that's closure.

Or – at least –

the only

I can think of –

--Kenn G. Novak



Corpus Christi by Doug Bacon

Voices

I will be ready when he calls my name
To leave a bland and dusty earth
Ready, to get up, to let loose demands
That have constrained my mind since
early birth

I will be ready to let go and become
free
Whenever nature's voice comes look-
ing for me
It will not have to tear apart
I would like to think I live for god and
inward art

It will not have to destroy my past
I am playing in this game and learning
fast
I know that my name will be called
And I may not have to travel far.

--Michael Herold

What's Inside

My mind is a blank page where thoughts con-
dense

to black, sticky liquid that fills my brain,
seeps down my sinus to fall sour on my
tongue.

Shakespeare will be reborn here in the South
by ink plopping down from my ears to sprout
in the earth of, "Don't leave until it's done."

Instead I go to eat pomegranates;
its juice mixes with ink to write my page.

Paper mill scent gently wafts to my nose.

The best pen for inspiration is thoughts
when the old desk rocks me softly to sleep.

A black stream dribbles down my chin.

--Karissa Womack



Harmony by Amanda Bearden



Tuskegee Chapel by Doug Bacon

The Crucible

His eyes are dark –
 Mirrors that reflect my gaze.
 He is haunting,
 Adamantine,
 Ensnaring,
 His presence emasculates you.
 And his smile is a sweet tasting
 Poison that freezes your soul.
 He erases you.
 And he stands with pride,
 Without pity.
 And he shatters you, then turns
 away;
 He leaves you as scattered as
 wind blown sands.
 Your heart mourns,
 Cries,
 Screams.
 Tears roll down your elegiac soul.
 And his oppressing shadow,
 And his parasitic memory,
 And his departing footsteps,
 Fade.

--Letia Owen Seaborn

Reroute

I cant tell the future
But I can recognize patterns well
I recognize human voices
I recognize myself

Sometimes the community seems to
suggest
That we are cows
Heading through a corral
Unconscious and unprepared

But we are intelligent
We are very self-aware
Even of our limitations

I don't see our genetic limits as a
weakness
It seems to be our egoism by which
we are easily unraveled

Intimidated and defeated
Persuaded and mislead
Enticed and sold

"I just bought the new...."
"I just saw the latest...."
"I just traded some of my self-worth
over to the trendiest...."

We think and behave politically
But the politics are the scapegoat
The monster is inside
The path to liberation is inside

--Michael Herold

the tourist

to collect everything
i'm the collector

to store it in a warehouse
stacking these side by side
weighing and measuring
and labeling it accordingly
i'll come back to it one day

i'll come back to it one day
to pick this up and
laugh at
things that
were nearly forgotten

i'll come back to it all one day
and build us a haunted house
that stands
and expands
with secrets and regrets

to come and go
in and
out of
your lives
my life
i'll never stay
but i'll keep these souvenirs

--Alex Daniel

On the Transit

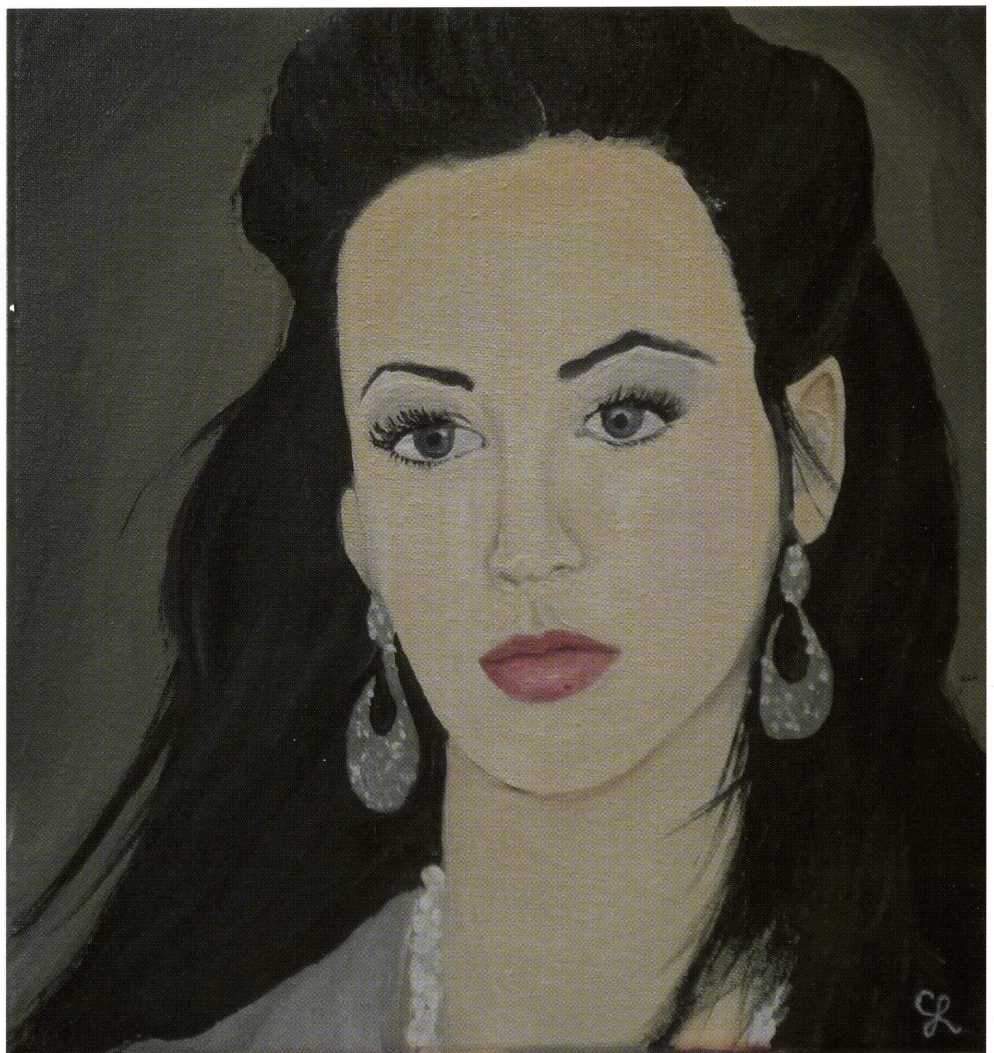
I.
 they are of a
 dreary
 gray
 with splotches of
 black
 and
 white
 checkered throughout.
 seats?
 little more than
 over-indulged
 slabs of cardboard—
 coarse.
 two
 stand like
 silent
 soldiers on either side of a
 “long”
 isle.

II.
 she sits on the
 far
 side,
 close
 to the window.
 beside her,
 an
 empty
 space
 that she pretends not to
 notice.

III.
 she focuses on the
 yellow-white
 lines
 that drift
 indifferently
 in and out of her view,
 the
 coarse
 grayness
 of her seat . . .

. . . she almost forgets that
 she's
 alone.

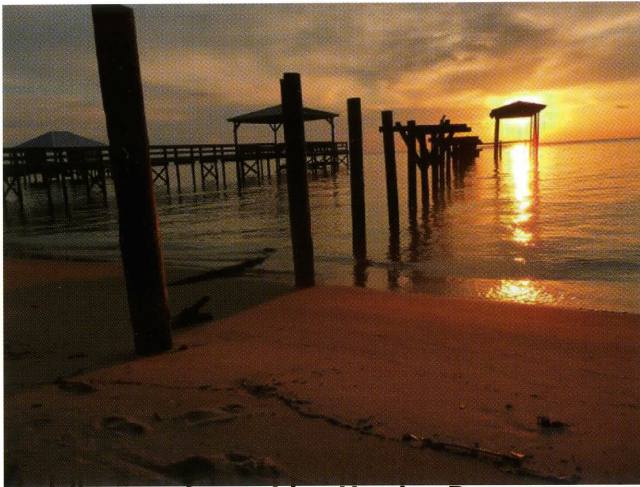
--Cara Golden



Art by Cody Lasseter



Boardwalk by Claire Ritchey



Mobile Bay Sunset by Hunter Dyas

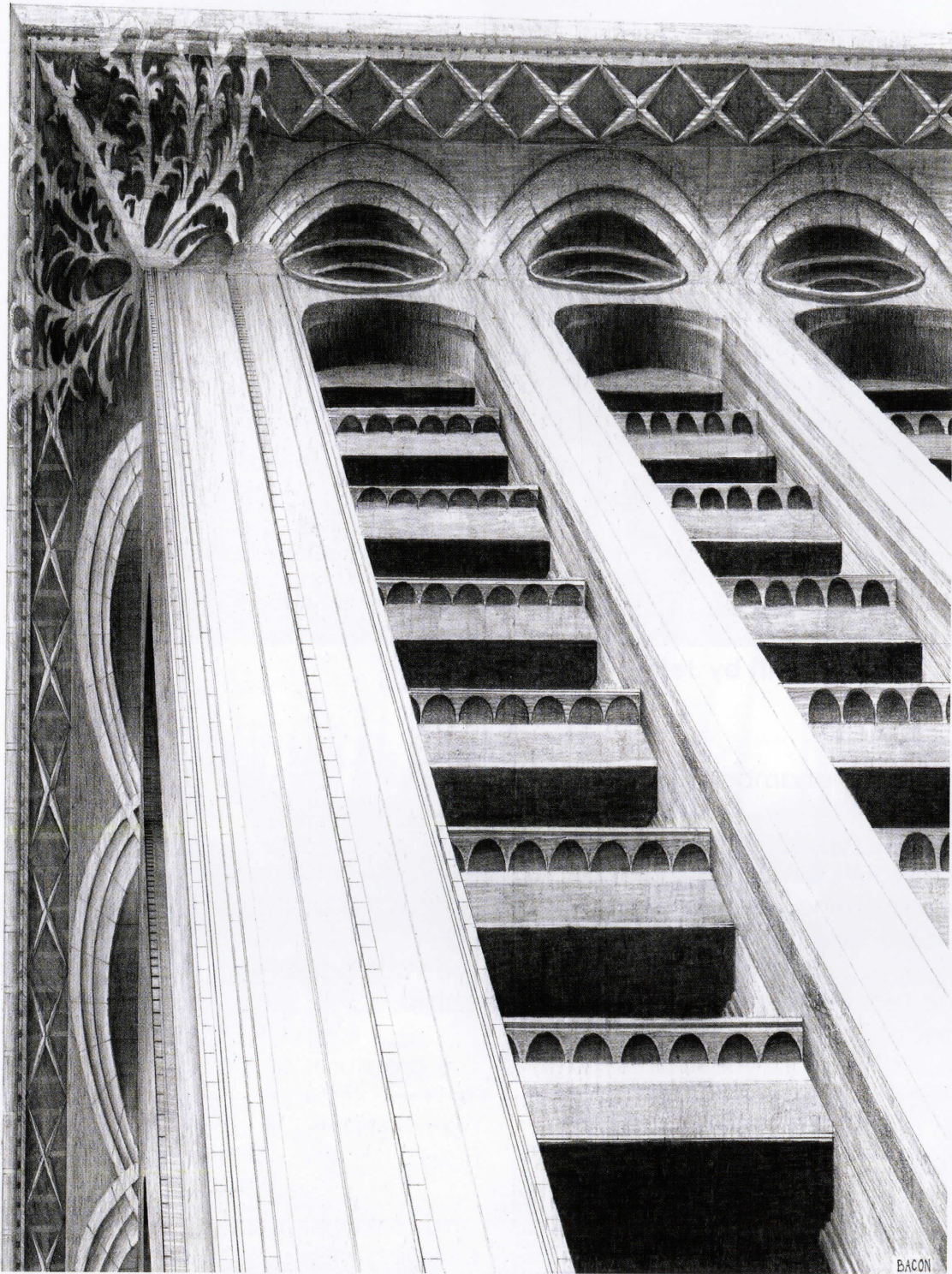
The Tide

The sea, that one, ebbs
 beneath a bank of dark clouds
 as the heart of a man in the
 offing,
 not mine nor yours,
 breaking – alone,
 as each individual
 piece of sand,
 as each individual dreams –
 alone as
 the heart filling
 with dark sand, piece
 by piece,
 peacefully beginning, pieces
 on pieces filled,
 neither with chaos nor peace,
 with darkness flowing
 as into a bank of clouds –
 against the shore.

--Kenn G. Novak



Surf City U.S.A by Andrew Dillard



The Guaranty Building by Doug Bacon



Samford Hall (Day - Night) by Jeffrey Bolan

Eventide Musing

Whilst in the company of amber hue and
 setting sun
 My thoughts, again, turn to you.
 To what facet of your being I cannot say;
 To one memory, my mind will not constrain itself.

In the dim of dusk your dark eyes haunt me,
 Though I feel no fear upon seeing them.
 In the monotony of coursing waves
 I feel the stillness of your absence,
 Yet there is peace in place of pain.
 The wind whips my hair in front of my face,
 And, behind the strands, I see you smile.
 Birds cry "Call! Call!" yet I indulge in silence,
 Afraid that to speak would break the spell.

The salty air has a soothing warmth to it,
 And as the dying sun blazons its glory across the
 sky
 The vagabond night comes to establish its
 camp.

The creatures of the night trill their songs,
 Yet I am strangely deaf to the sound,
 For it is still you to whom my nighttime thoughts
 hold.

And I smile at the stars, who see all,
 Knowing they hold you in their unblinking gaze.
 And as I lay down to rest, I lay aside my
 thoughts,
 Hopeful that I may soon meet them in my
 dreams.

--Letia Owen Seaborn

Whilst Embroiled in Humans vs. Zombies...

I sit here, pen in hand, awaiting my end. This life, so short, seemed to stretch onward to the horizon before my lonesome eye, threatening to never end. I've pondered the fragility with which a human life is said to be vested, but never did I imagine myself put under the knife, not to satisfy ageless gods. I hid the best I could from their inhuman rage, but as time ticks toward its end, I know that I shall shortly fall. All life's a stage (or so they say), but if this brilliant show could never end... The zombie stands at the door, impatiently... I shall go forth nevermore.

--Matthew Pollock



Field Games by Zack Terry

RUN

Brandi Byrd

She ran, and ran, and ran. Over and through bushes. She dodged tree limbs and jumped over tree roots. Her beautiful white dress was now stained with mud and muck. On that quiet night you could hear only her footsteps and the ripping of the hem of that dress when it snagged on some of the brush. The girl said nothing, but continued to run amidst her heavy breathing and her tears. On and on she ran. "No one's following me, I know it," she thought. That didn't stop her. It seemed to speed her up. And so, she ran. She pushed limbs out of the way. Briers began to tear at her skin. Limbs and leaves scratched her face. She stumbled a time or two, but she caught herself and pressed on. She had to. There was nothing left for her where she was. She could no longer stay where she was. There was too much pain, so much heartache. The things that once brought her joy were now tormenting reminders of what would never be.

As she continued, she weakened. That run faded to her barely dragging herself along. She was covered in mud. Her dress now resembled rags more so than the beautiful white dress she wore. Whelps and scratches covered her arms and face. Some of the blood from the

scratches had dried; other wounds were just getting started. Her foot caught under a root and she fell. She couldn't move anymore. "I must keep going. I must," she thought. She tried to drag herself to a nearby tree so she could rest for a moment before she began again. She tried, and tried, and tried. Nothing. Her tears flowed down her face over the mud, scratches, and blood. Her ankle was stuck in the root and the pain told her that she had twisted it. More pain. More tears.

For the first time, she heard something. It sounded like footsteps. It couldn't be though. No one was following her. Or were they? The moonlight that could make it through the trees gleamed and gave her a glimpse of what might be making such noise. It was a man, someone she had seen before, someone she knew. She still wanted to run, but her tangled foot and exhaustion stopped that. She tried to stifle her sobs so he would continue on. The steps had stopped for a moment, the moment that she saw him, and then they quickened in her direction.

"I've finally found you." He dropped down to his knees beside her.

"Leave me...leave me alone," she responded. Her tears continued, partly in

embarrassment, partly due to her ankle.

"Never."

"It would be better for you. Go."

"Never," he responded again.

There was a pause. Everything seemed to stand still. The girl wanted to look up into the man's face, to let him see how hurt she was, but she couldn't. She was too embarrassed. A few more tears slipped down her face.

Finally, she muttered, "Why?"

"'Why' what?" he said as he worked at untangling her foot.

"Why help me? Why sit here in the mud and mess with me?" She stopped.

"Why care?"

He had freed her foot and he looked up at her. She was looking at him as best as one could with her head down.

He smiled. "Because I love you, that's why?"

Those three words. Oh, how she had longed to hear them before. Had she heard them this time, or was it a dream as it had been many times before? She wanted it to be true, but she hesitated to believe it.

He knew that she doubted. "Look," he said as he moved closer to her. He placed his hands and arms in front of her. She saw that he had scratches and blood all over

his arms as well. She placed her arms out in front of him so he could see that the same had become of her. She finally looked up at him.

He smiled at her again. "Come, let me show you what I mean."

He stood up. The girl hesitated for a moment but decided that following him might be the best thing to do. She started to stand up, but her ankle would not support her. She went tumbling toward the ground. Before she hit the hard ground though, the man caught her in his arms. Those arms were strong and something told her that things were going to be better now.

"Can't have any of that now, can we?"

He carried her past those trees where she had fallen and on a little ways until they reached a brook. The man set her down on the bank and walked into the water. He rolled up his sleeves and washed his hands. Then he did an odd thing. He began to wash her feet. Gently, he washed the wounds on her injured leg and on the other as well. He rinsed the mud and blood from the cuts on her feet and calves off. A moment later he ripped his sleeve, soaked it

in the brook, and brought it up out from the water. He sat beside her and wiped her face. Gone was the mud. The blood was washed away. He wiped away the tears. He soaked the sleeve again and washed her hands and arms off.

"Much better, isn't it?"

The girl smiled for the first time and nodded.

"What were you going to show me?" she asked.

The man showed her his hands and arms again.

"Those scratches look like mine," she replied.

He soaked the sleeve again without a word. The man washed his hands and his arms off with the rag and then dipped his feet in the brook before wiping them off as well. All this he did with a slight grin.

"Yes, I do have scars like you have. I have been

through the same trials and the same tribulations as you and many others have been through. But there are some scars that I have that you don't have."

He again showed her his arms and hands again. That is when she saw it. Two deep scars in his wrists.

"And look..." he said as he drew his feet closer to her. There again were two deep scars in his feet.

"What happened?" she asked. A few tears rolled down her cheek as she felt the scars with her fingers.

"Love happened."

She wiped a tear away and looked up at him. He sensed her confusion and with a smile began to explain.

"My Father had perfection in mind. He created what He saw and it was perfect. He created a world that



Intersection by Weng Lon Lao

would love Him. But one day, perfection was disrupted and replaced with the world that we know today. Lies, deception, murder, pain; all of it came from that one day. It would have been easy for Him to give up on this world and start completely over. However, He knew that this world, His creation would fall before He created it and He had a plan to redeem it."

"Love..." the girl said.

"Yes, love. He sent me to bring Him glory. To offer a way, the only way, back to His presence. More love than anyone could ever imagine."

"That is amazing. What I would give to be loved like that." That thought reminded her why she was running. Everything in her wanted to run again. If she could run out of her own skin, she would have.

"But you are," whispered the man. "You have to accept it."

She knew that she wanted to. The words she wished to express were on the tip of her tongue when she noticed how filthy she was.

"I am filthy."

She paused and tears rolled down her face in a torrent. "Inside and out."

"You can be cleaned inside

and out. You only have to accept it."

She lifted her head. Gently the man wiped away another tear, kissed her on the forehead, and softly whispered, "You only have to accept me."

"I do."

Everything stopped. That urge to run, the fear of being left alone, and so much more. For the first time, there was peace. She was at peace.

He lifted in his arms and carried her into the river. The man lovingly submerged the young woman under the water. She came up, cleaned from head to toe. Her garments were whiter than they had ever been before. They smiled at each other and he carried her out

of the water.

They continued to talk about this love. He told her of grace and hope and a mercy beyond all understanding. He continued to tell her about his Father.

Morning was approaching. A new day was dawning.

"I think it is time that we should go. A new day waits."

He held out his hand and helped her to her feet. She followed him, her hand in his, as he led her toward the sunrise.

She was entirely caught up in her hero, her savior. So caught up that she did not realize that her ankle had been completely restored. She was more in tune with what had happened to her heart.



Tarnow Cathedral by Zack Terry

Rejection

I. Thesis

Every poet knows, of course,
that rejection is a knife in the heart,
a kick in the pants,
a wave of disappointment and depression,
and lemon juice in a paper cut.

II. Antithesis

What they don't know –
or maybe they just forget to tell you –
is that it is not so much a stabbing or a beating
as it is a solitary walk in the woods.
It is an oceanic wave of dejection almost as much
as it is the milk-soggy cereal at the bottom of the bowl,
but not quite.

An empty mailbox is only an empty mailbox,
not some tragic symbol of an empty soul,
but there is nothing quite as heartbreaking
as a pen run out of ink when the paper is still blank.

III. Synthesis

Three mornings later, you will wake up early –
knowing that you are the bird and no longer the worm –
and the six inches of snow outside your door
will look like childhood and daydreams.
Forgetting about the ice on the windshield,
even as you pull out of the garage,
you take a left turn instead of a right
and drive blindly into the future
as though your inkwell
will always be full.

—Megan Reynolds



Photography by Alexander Welsh

Showers

Show her.
The room.
Undress.

Show her.

Show her the room.
Undress and let
brisk water press
against her skin.

Show her damp droplets
trickling evenly
upon her subtle skin.

Show her crisp water
drizzling upon her
wilderness of hair.

Show her whispering water
quavering mellow melodies
winding hankering citherns.

Show her
that she is
the only one.

Show her.

Show her the room to undress
and let sultry bodies press
against one and each akin,
with brisk water cooling her
moist steaming and searing skin.

Show her settling dew
quenching sparks within
her rainforest of tresses.

Show her the brink
of cool green banks
of spent emotions.

Show her.

Show her complacencies
of the removal
of the peignoir.

Shower.



Photography by April Staton

Rinse.
Shower.
Repeat.

Show her steam swelling
in the shower.
Shower her in
swelling steam.

Show her
that she
is one.
Show her that she
and the shower
are one.

Shower.
Dry.
Shower.
Dress.

Show her humid
hands to dew
her balmy soul.

Show her.

Show her calm.
Show her conscience hands
palm for palm.

Show her rest.
Show her humid hands
to caress her breasts.

Show her.

— Kenneth Novak

Shades of Brown

Karissa Womack

Fiction

He didn't mind the driving or the exorbitant bulk of the mail-order gym equipment. What made his nails dig into the steering wheel as he sped through the country road curves was the ubiquitous brown: brown button-shirts, brown pants, brown socks, brown hat. Even worse than the pervasive hue of shit were the dogs that don't bite. Every old woman on his UPS route waiting on packages of Tupperware or spices had one. He'd gotten down the trick of utilizing their boxed goods as a shield between himself and the growling mutts. "Beauty don't bite," the voice of Mrs. Sneed down on Sandy Fork would match the pitch of her pup. Aaron had been sure she wasn't going to bite her, but he had a leg full of scars that said Beauty might hold different sentiments towards him. The last one had taken a chunk all the way down to the bone. It's healed now, but the skin's still marred. Aaron would sit staring at it for an hour in his bathtub until the brown half-moon on his calf burned in his eyelids.

His hands relaxed on the wheel as the tires spewed gravel down the half-mile long driveway of 573 Mill Road. Here the front porch

was owned by an uppity terrier, Brandy. Somewhere in a back room Maggie was painting her nails green. It was a Monday and her restaurant, Maggie's Bisques, was closed. She didn't get enough business for it to matter and the busiest rushes were Sundays after church, so she always closed on Mondays. Aaron had been delivering her napkins, bowls, and other soup-making necessities since she opened a few months ago. She'd been a nurse for most of her life, but she told Aaron she was sick of pumping people full of antibiotics. She had decided to go back to the basics, the original cure for any ailment—soup. Aaron had felt an attraction to their porch side rapport since his first visit. He stared at her white-washed door trying to recall whether she had been the one who started their conversations. He remembered having asked if she was Maggie Benthway and if she'd please sign her name right there, but he decided that didn't count. She'd talked to him first. At the beckoning of the doorbell she appeared in a dipping beige house dress with natural right nails in contrast with the vibrance of her left.

"How's the week going?

I'm enjoying this day off," she turned her face to the delightfully sunny weather that was making sweat beads gather on his back and would later saturate his entire body.

"Just started for me, can't really complain," Aaron replied, the terrier dancing around his boots, letting out short yaps. He set the package down as a barrier and tousled its brown head just roughly enough to quiet its barks. Wanting to get the business out of the way, he handed her the electronic board for her signature.

"So how about this weekend, you doing anything interesting or just your usual housework?" She returned his board and planted herself a few feet away. Polish ethyl flooded his nostrils, partially covering her soft magnolia scent.

"Oh I don't know, don't have anything planned really, what about you?"

"Just work at the restaurant, but I close early on Fridays." Her closeness drew him in.

"Would you like to do something then?"

"Sure, what did you have in mind?" The terrier barked again in disagreement.

"Dinner maybe, I can take you somewhere they serve

solid foods."

"I could use a change like that. So you'll pick me up at eight?"

"Eight, okay." He hurried down the steps, the terrier posted on the porch between Maggie's legs, barking out sharp warnings.

She had been asking him about his weekends, throwing easy openings his way for the past month or so, but he hadn't been sure he wanted to go until recently. Aaron had been out with a few women right after his divorce. There was one, Amy, who he'd seen for the longest. She had bobbed blond hair and was nice enough to pretend that she liked watching ESPN. She had a six year old boy who was incredibly adorable and more importantly, well-mannered. She was looking for someone to help her raise the boy and Aaron just wasn't up for it. His own daughter had chosen to live with her mother and was about to graduate high school; he was exhausted of them. He had decided there was no way he was going to do it all over again. More importantly, he liked not having his new home taken from him. He was done with marriage; he liked the idea of living in the house he sweated out in the sun every day to buy, not having to hand it over to an unhappy woman.

After Amy, Aaron had stopped trying. But his mind had been on Maggie a lot

the past few days. He'd had a few too many Corona's last Friday and chipped his front teeth tripping over the empty box of bottles. He didn't get his veneer caps put on until early that Monday morning, so he'd spent his weekend eating soup. He had never spent much time in the soup aisle, and looking through rows of Campbell's broccoli cheese and bean with bacon, his mind wandered right to Maggie. He started to think it might not be such a bad idea to have someone there who could tell him what soups didn't taste like condensed crap, who could sit across the table and share it with him. And there was something different about Maggie from the other women he'd met. She had her own house; she even had her own restaurant. She wasn't looking for someone to take care of her; she took care of herself. He let himself hope that, like him, she was just looking for someone to pass the time with.

Over the next couple days, Aaron would look at his brown sleeves and think about Maggie's dog. He convinced himself that the little, brown terrier wasn't such a bad thing; its teeth were so small that it couldn't do more than pinch. Besides, she'd named him Brandy. Any woman willing to name a boy dog Brandy had to be less uppity than her pet.

Thursday dragged on in anticipation of his date and he drove his route in double time, trying to chase the day to its close. One of his last stops was a house beside Pine Lake. He heard the yelling as soon as he stepped out of his truck. If it had been a different day, he might have waited for things to quiet down, but he was in a hurry to beat the day. He rang the doorbell and a woman walked out with flat-ironed hair so that it frizzed instantly in the Alabama humidity.

"It's for you," she yelled over her shoulder, immediately pursing her lips back miles away from an acknowledging smile. Her sandals flapped against the steps as she took off towards her Jeep. Aaron peeked his head inside the door she'd left wide open and saw a man with a flushed face sitting on the hardwood floor, back propped against a sofa. He didn't get up, so Aaron walked inside and set the package down beside him.

"Sorry you had to hear that," he said as he scrawled his signature on the pad.

"It's nothing," Aaron replied.

"You know it's an anniversary gift. It's from her parents. They send a box of cheese and sausage and shit once a year to make up for hating my guts the other 364 days."

"I'm sorry man."

"Look, I don't want this shit. I already signed for it, can you just take it for me? I'd rather Valerie think I ate it all without her, that'd get her back."

"I really can't do that. Can't you just throw it away or something?"

"Valerie's too smart for that, she'll look everywhere, even in the trash. Just do a guy a favor, you can't tell me you haven't been here."

"Yeah, I feel you." Aaron took the package from the man's extended hands.

"Thanks man." Aaron headed out the open door.

That night, Aaron poured the contents of the man's package out onto the fold-up table he used in his dining room. The smoked cheese and summer sausage were a reminder of the woman's frizzed hair and how easy it was for her to get in her Jeep and leave. He couldn't help but think of how lucky that man sitting on his floor was. At least the man's wife had the decency to leave instead of kicking him out. Aaron thought of how much he'd rather be sitting at his old table, the one he bought unfinished and stained himself. He wondered what kind of table Maggie had and if she'd taken it from anybody.

Because it was sitting in front of him, Aaron opened up the cheese and then started on the sausage. A few bites later and his veneer

cap sank itself into the sausage and crunched inside his mouth. Aaron pulled out the broken veneer and ran to the bathroom. His mouth gapped open to reveal what looked to him like a set of hillbilly chompers. He smiled at the figure in the mirror- sun spots from years down at Cahaba Creek without sunscreen, lines and creases that made an atlas of his skin, and chipped front teeth.

"Hey, this is Aaron. I don't think I'm going to be able to

make it Friday. I've just got so much going on, I really just don't have time to date," his voice dully sounded into the receiver.

"Seriously? Wait, how did you get my number anyways?"

"It was in the records for your deliveries. It doesn't matter. Look, I'm sorry."

"Don't call me again," she asserted and hung up.

Aaron called in sick to work that Friday even though he knew the dental office was

Saving it up

I can tell you many things,
but I cannot tell you everything.
In silence, as we walk, I fill
the breezy space between us
with all of the things
I dare not utter.

This great litany
of faults and fears,
of failures and fantasies
sung by the choir of secrets
pressing on my chest
remains unheard by you,

who are not the one
I want to tell.
He is still far from finding
me waiting here, talking to
you, telling you many things but
saving everything for him.

— Susan Matassa

closed. He spent the day in front of his television, dozing off when he couldn't find anything he liked. The day rolled into night and 7:30 glared red from his television clock. He went into the bathroom and smiled at his fragmented grin. He thought about another meal of chicken broth and his stomach turned. Maggie could take care of him, what he wondered was if she still would. He thought about calling her, but remembered the click of the phones disconnect from last night and knew she wouldn't hear him out over the phone. He got into his pick-up and drove out to 573 Mill Road. He rang the doorbell and stood waiting as Brandy jumped around his legs, barking. The door cracked an inch open, "What are you doing here?"

"It's eight isn't it? Listen, I'm

sorry. I want to take you out, I just didn't know what I was doing."

"Too late Aaron. You really hurt my feelings. I was upset so I called up my ex; I didn't want to be alone."

The door shut and the deadbolt clicked shut. He could hear her feet treading lightly down the hall, a soft running away. He wanted to beat the door so loudly that she couldn't ignore him and would have to come back, but he took it as a favor that she had bypassed the future kicking him out she surely would have done and he headed back to his car. Without Maggie there, Brandy ran down the porch after Aaron. He closed his door on the barking and started the engine. The terrier stood yapping in front of the truck. "Get out of my way mutt."

He pumped on the gas but

the terrier stood his ground and crunched under the tires just like veneer breaking under teeth. Aaron jumped out of his truck and looked back at the porch, but the door was still shut and none of the curtains had been raised. He grabbed a grocery bag lying under his seat, put the dog inside, and drove back to his house. He got a shovel from his garage and carried the grocery bag out to the line of trees at the edge of his yard. He dug a whole deep in the dirt and buried the terrier, covering the disturbed soil with pine straw and twigs. Sweating and covered in dirt, he walked inside his home. He turned the bath on steaming hot, the water turning brown as he sank in. That was all he had, a teeming pool of brown.



Photography by Frank Orona

The Replacement

Susan matassa

Fiction

"I feel compelled to tell you that Walter is not a real person," the letter said. Sean could hear the pity. "Mr. Carver's dementia has worsened considerably with the decline of his physical health. I just wanted you to be prepared when you arrived. Walter always seems to be around." It was signed by a nurse whose name he did not recognize and printed on his father's personal letterhead.

Sean tucked the letter back into his front pocket, stuffing the crumpled edges far enough down so that they could not be seen. He ran his hand down the front lapel of his suit to smooth the wrinkles out, feeling the supple Italian tailoring beneath his equally supple hand. The suit was striped with delicate lines and seemed an inappropriate place to keep embarrassing secrets. His father was too young to have dementia. He was too young to be dying.

Sean hesitated at the imposing double door to his father's rooms. It was much bigger than he remembered even though he had been small the last time he had been there. The oak door was a work of art, something to be admired. The German carving had cost a

small fortune, but Sean had never liked it. The door was just one more thing standing between him and his father. Now he was dying, and it was still here. He placed his hand on the door, and then removed it. He stared straight ahead, but wasn't looking at the door. Finally he caught the door off guard and opened it in a swift struggle. It was much heavier than Sean anticipated.

On the other side, Thomas Carver III lay in a hospital bed that was not a hospital bed in a large elegant room into which someone had tossed an abundance of medical effects. His IV hung on a stand which possessed a cruel verisimilitude to the hand-carved wooden hat stand in the corner. The crash cart on the left side of his bed mirrored the brass handled bedside table on the right. Thomas Carver's head sagged as death's hand pressed on the back of his neck. His face was whiter than his 800 thread count sheets.

There was a chair on either side of the bed. Sean chose the left, closest to the crash cart. Death always comes too soon. Sean had expected to be able to hate his father for many years to come.

The not-so-old man's eyelids lifted to reveal glassy marbles beneath, and he smiled with the benevolence only a father can show. It must be the meds, thought Sean.

"Tommy," said the father, taking the son to a place that smelled of papers and cigars and Port. But the young man recovered quickly.

"It's Sean now, I go by Sean," said the son. He licked his lips and checked his watch. He looked around the room. The papers on the desk were in straight piles. It seemed as if he hadn't gotten out of bed in a while. Thomas Carver didn't keep straight papers.

"Your mother didn't like you going by your middle name," the father managed to sputter before falling into a fit of convulsed coughing. The whole room shook. Sean waited.

"Mother's dead," he said when his father had quieted.

Thomas hesitated, coughed nervously and looked away. Sean stared at him, begging his father to contradict him. Tell me she just went to the store he thought longingly. Tell me she's on another vacation with the girls. Tell me I can have her back.

Sean hadn't talked about his mother in years. He wanted to though. The only thing he wanted more was for her to walk right in through the big oak door. And if the best he could get was an imaginary mother that only his father could see, Sean would still take that over reality in a heartbeat.

"I know that Tommy. I may be dying, but I know that," he responded.

Sighing, Sean put his head in his hands and rubbed his face slowly, elbows on knees. Through his fingers, Sean's eyes found his father's still serene face.

"So you're really dying,"

Sean said after a moment.

"Yes, I guess I really am," Thomas replied. He stared off into a corner as if thinking about death for the first time. Without turning back, he asked, "Why did you come here?"

"You asked me to" Sean said on the border of exasperation.

Thomas turned back to look at his son again. His eyes were sad.

"I've been asking you for 10 years, Tommy."

"You weren't dying then." I wish you weren't dying now.

"And what's so special about dying?"

Sean sat silently for less

than a moment and then got up. He walked around the foot of the bed with his hands in his pockets and let out a long breath he had been holding in since he received the crumpled letter in his breast pocket.

"Well most people come to their senses right before they do," said Sean, a kind of hope welling inside him. "Most people try to make their peace before they leave."

"That's true I guess. I feel that I see a lot of things clearer now, Tommy," said Thomas, staring at the corner of the room again. Sean glanced in that direction but



Photography by Jeffrey Bolan

(Special thanks to Auburn University Library Special Collections and Archives)

saw nothing but an armchair with one of his father's coats thrown across its back. His father's head had fallen back against his pillow. "I'm glad you came," he whispered, "I have something important to tell you."

Sean moved back to his chair and pulled it closer to the bedside, leaning his face in close to the bed. His father's eyes were closed, but there was a lingering smile on his face as if he saw something mildly pleasing on the inside of his eyelids. Sean looked away from him like a child and mumbled, "I have something to tell you too, Dad."

Thomas turned his face once more to his son, then

rolled his heavy head on the pillow so that his eyes rested again on the empty chair in the corner. He said, "I've decided to leave the money to Walter."

A very long moment passed and Sean was silent. Thomas did not notice.

"He has been like a son to me, especially after your mother died."

Sean sat up. His hands were clenched tightly together as if he were the only thing holding himself there. Thomas continued, his face growing flushed.

"You've done so well for yourself, I knew you would understand."

Sean had crossed the room and laid his hand on

the stained oak of the door before he stopped. He allowed his head to drop slowly to the wood and rest against its lacquered surface, eyes tightly closed, mouth in a firm line. "Understand what?"

"That I cannot imagine life without him."

Sean did not see the genuine belief shining through those clouded eyes. The dying man's head had fallen against the damp pillow, his arm outstretched with fingers extended, reaching for an unseen hand.

Sean left the corpse of a stranger alone. This time, the oak door opened lightly beneath his fingertips.



Photography by Jeffrey Bolan (Special thanks to Auburn University Library Special Collections and Archives)

O The Auburn v a l

Auburn's only source for fiction news

Campus Intrigue

Liberal Arts Student: Degree is Practical, Not a Giant Waste of Money

Zack Fritz

Senior News Correspondent

In a statement released late Tuesday afternoon expressing "complete and total confidence and not really any regret at all," D.J. Hoffmann explained to the media that his liberal arts degree is both "important and, you know, practical."

Hoffmann, who has maintained a 2.7 grade point average while working towards his anthropology degree, was highly critical of those "unambitious ass-clowns in the College of Science and Mathematics," Hoffmann, though unprompted by reporters, proceeded to give an excruciatingly detailed explanation of the differences between physical and cultural anthropology.

Hoffman's father released a contradictory statement late Tuesday night, expressing disappointment with his son's choice of study. "I've worked too damn hard," the ex-marine explained, "to see that no-good hippy-ass bastard waste all my money."

"I don't think my relationship with my father has really im-

pacted anything about me at all," Hoffmann explained. When pressed, he admitted that his fellow liberal arts students pursuing psychology degrees may disagree.

Study: Guy Sitting Next To You In Class Isn't Creepy.

Gabby Bates

Women's Health Editor

A field study released by the Auburn University School of Men's Health on Friday confirms that the guy who keeps sitting next to you in class isn't creepy.

"This new research will help dispel some of the misconceptions about the intentions of that one guy who stares at you all class," Dr. Paul Burke explained. "The science suggests that he's actually a really nice guy and you should definitely give him a chance."

Although a control group of female test subjects complained that the guy "was creepy, threatening, and made [them] feel uncomfortable," the study found that he was actually caring, compassionate, and definitely looks like that one celeb-

rity you think is really hot.

"There's one guy in particular that always sits behind me, and I was pretty sure he was staring at my ass," Stephanie Alcott, a junior in the College of business, told reporters. "The study ensures that in 100% of instances, the guy sitting behind you isn't staring at your ass, so I guess it was just my imagination."

The School of Men's Health has announced that their next project will prove that your boyfriend definitely isn't cheating on you.

If You Only Go to the Library During Fi- nals, I Hope You Die

Nicholas West

Weekly Columnist

I frequent the library all throughout the semester. I go study because there's always an isolated, quiet place to study. And by "always," I mean every single day of the year except for the week of finals.

You people, who either don't study or study somewhere other than the library for the entire fucking semester, ruin the best building on campus. Every time I hear your study group (and you're always in a study group, because you're entirely incapable of studying alone) complaining about how hard your final's

going to be, I want to stab you all in the throat with my pen and drag your bodies to aisle of Canadian reference books, because nobody will ever find you there. Seriously, I'm going to kill you.

Thanks for reading, and be sure to check out my column next week, in which I discuss techniques for coping with final's stress.

Opinion: Stop Handing me Shit on Campus

Nicholas West
Weekly Columnist

Anyone who attends Auburn University knows that it's hard to walk down the Haley Center Concourse without someone trying to hand you something. I'm sick of pretending to be on my cell phone or staring at the ground to avoid eye contact. The few times that I've actually had the guts to politely say, "no thanks," you either act all sad or tell me I'm going to hell.

And seriously, I have, like, three hundred new testaments. I'm also fully aware of breast cancer, every sorority girl that's ever given me a piece of paper about breast cancer. Seriously, is anyone not aware of breast cancer? And yes, lots of people in the world are hungry. It's a shame that paper isn't edible, because the thousands of pounds a year of hunger-awareness flyers I get handed could feed a whole third world country.

The only time it is okay to hand out stuff on a concourse is when it's edible, and, as I mentioned early, paper isn't edible.

Sports

BCS Computer Kills Creator, Attempts to Enslave Humanity

Zack Fritz
Senior Sports Correspondent

The BCS ranking system is once again the center of a national controversy. After discovering that the BCS computer murdered the six creators of its polls, authorities now suspect that the controversial ranking system is trying to enslave humanity. Those critical of the BCS see this as further reason to bring a playoff system to college football.

Experts believe that the BCS became self-aware sometime this past week, murdering the only six people with a strong understanding of its programming. Experts also believe that the computers don't give Oregon enough credit, and that Boise State is the real victim of the maniacal system.

The BCS tried to enslave mankind by harvesting electrical impulses from the brains of humans, keeping the enslaved ignorant of their situation by plugging them into a virtual reality. In order to keep the vegetative humans from rebelling, the virtual reality featured a college football playoff system.

Military personnel were able to hack into the computer's hard drive, but the system could not be shut down due to a contractual agreement between the NCAA and the BCS that extends until 2014.

Little Leaguer Walks in Six Runs, Demoted to AA Orphanage

Zack Fritz
Senior Sports Correspondent

Jimmy Defoe, the eleven-year-old son of Little-League baseball enthusiast Stephen Defoe, was optioned to the AA orphanage after his team, the Auburn Cobras, lost on Saturday. Jimmy, who entered the game with his team up by three runs, walked nine of the ten hitters he faced before the inning ended due to the Little-League run limit.

"This game's about getting outs," his father explained. "He just hasn't been able to find the strike-zone lately, and our family decided to go in a different direction."

"That's just the nature of the game," said Lou Phillips, the coach of the twelve and under Cobras. "One day you're a Little-League pitcher, and the next you're an orphan. That's just what happens when you disgrace your family and let down your whole team. It's tough."

Jimmy was quick to take the blame for his performance, though he could have used his belligerently drunk father's unyielding harassment as an excuse. "I just didn't have command of my fastball today. I'm going to work hard, and hopefully I'll be back with a real family soon."

In other team news, the Cobra's right-fielder Dennis Hughes, who recently sat indian-style on first base and sobbed after being called out, has been designated for assignment by his parents.



Wishes by Katherine Harding



Want to work for us?

We here at The Circle are looking for new talent for the 2012-2013 school year. Applications will be available in Student Center room 1115 beginning the second week of the Fall 2012 semester. If you have any questions, we can be reached at TheAUCircle@gmail.com, or come by and see us!



Always Pointless.
Never Boring.

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